SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

OR,

THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG MAN

Paris!

BY

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

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SIMON P. MAGEE,
PUBLISHER.
CHICAGO, ILL.

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of a Young Man
PART I

I

On September 15, 1840, at just about six in the morning, great swirling clouds of smoke were puffing up out of the *Ville-de-Montereau,* docked but nearly ready to shove off from the Quai Saint-Bernard.

People were rushing up out of breath; barrels, cables, baskets filled with linens all made it hard to get around; the sailors wouldn't answer anyone's questions; people were bumping into each other; packages were piling ever higher between the two paddle-boxes; and the general racket was absorbed into the louder hissing of the steam, escaping through iron plates and shrouding everything in a whitish mist while the bells, up in the bows of the ship, were constantly clanging.

Finally the boat pushed off; and the riverbanks on either side, dotted with shops, workshops, and factories, slid past, unspooling like a pair of ribbons.

A young man, eighteen years old, with long hair, gripping a sketchbook under his arm, stood motionless beside the ship's tiller. He gazed through the foggy air at the church spires, the various buildings whose names he didn't know; then he took in, with one last gaze, the Île Saint-Louis, the Cité, Notre-Dame; and soon, Paris disappearing altogether from view, he let out a great sigh.

Monsieur Frédéric Moreau, a newly minted bachelor of arts, was returning to Nogent-sur Seine, where he would have to languish for

two months before coming back to begin legal studies. His mother, having provided the essential money, had sent him off to Le Havre to visit his uncle in the hope that he would name the young man his heir; Frédéric had got back just the night before; and now he was consoling himself for having to leave the capital by taking the longest possible route home.

All the tumult began subsiding; everyone had taken his or her place; some remained standing, warming themselves next to the engine, while the funnel spat and hacked out—slowly, rhythmically—its plume of black smoke; dewlike droplets dripped across the brass fittings; the boat trembled a little from an interior vibration, and the two paddle wheels, turning rapidly, churned the water.

The river was lined with sandy banks. Now and then they came upon log rafts, which rocked and undulated in the swirl of the boat's wake, or sometimes a rowboat in which a man sat, fishing; then the drifting fogs dissipated, the sun came out, and the hill on the Seine's right bank began to fall away little by little, while another one arose, closer to them, on the opposite bank.

Trees stood atop this new hillside, among low-slung houses with Italian-style roofs. There were gardens sloping down, separated from each other by new walls, iron grillwork gates, lawns, greenhouses, pots of geraniums lined along terraces with railings you could lean on. More than one passenger, watching these attractive, serene homes go passing by, wished he could be the owner of one, live there all the rest of his days, with a nice billiard table, or a little boat, a wife, or some other fantasy. The new, unaccustomed pleasure of traveling by boat put people into expansive moods. The clever types were already making their little jokes. Many were singing. They treated themselves to drinks. The good cheer was contagious.

Frédéric's thoughts drifted to the room he would occupy at home, and from there to the outline of a play, then to subjects that might make for good sketches, and then to the love affairs he would have someday. It seemed to him that the happiness the excellence of his soul deserved was a little tardy in arriving. He recited melancholic verses to himself; he paced swiftly around the deck; he went all the way forward, as far as the ship's bell—and there, in a circle of passengers and sailors, he caught sight of a gentleman flirting with a peasant girl, his hand continually toying with a gold cross she wore across her

breast. He was a big man, around forty, with frizzy hair. His robust torso made his black velour jacket fit him tightly, two gleaming emeralds adorned his chambray shirt, and the cuffs of his wide white trousers draped over a pair of strange red boots, embossed with blue designs, in Russian leather.

The presence of Frédéric didn't bother him at all. He turned toward him several times, including him in the conversation by winking at him; soon he was offering cigars to everyone standing near him. But evidently growing bored with the company, he walked off. Frédéric followed him.

The ensuing conversation began with comparing different sorts of tobacco and then turned, naturally, to women. The man in the red boots gave advice to the young man; he elaborated certain theories, narrated some anecdotes, cited himself as an example, spinning it all out in a paternal sort of tone and with a perfectly simple, open amorality that was quite enjoyable.

He was for a republic; he had traveled, was familiar with the interiors of theaters, restaurants, newspapers, and with all the famous artists, to whom he always referred by their first names. Frédéric confided his future plans to him; he encouraged him in them.

But then, gazing up at the ship's funnel, he suddenly changed the subject, beginning to mutter a lengthy calculation, trying to work out "how much each piston stroke must generate, and how many strokes there must be per minute," etc. Then, once he'd arrived at the sum, he turned and expressed his admiration for the fine landscape around them. He said he was lucky, being able to get away from business matters.

Frédéric felt a growing respect for him, and couldn't help asking for his name. The stranger replied, all in one breath, "Jacques Arnoux, proprietor of L'Art Industriel, Boulevard Montmartre."

A servant in a cap with gold braid on it came up to them and said, "Would monsieur be willing to go below? Madamoiselle is crying."

Arnoux disappeared.

L'Art Industriel was a hybrid kind of business establishment, combining a newspaper about painting with a shop selling pictures. Frédéric had often seen the title advertised in the window of his hometown bookstore, printed on an enormous poster, where the name of Jacques Arnoux was displayed in magisterial capital letters.

The sun beamed down from high overhead, making the iron bands around the masts and on the railings glitter and gleam, as did the surface of the water itself; the boat cut the water into two furrows that spread out all the way to the meadows lining the banks. At every bend in the river, the same curtain of pale poplars came into view; otherwise, the countryside was entirely empty. The little white clouds up in the sky seemed to stand still—and now a sensation of ennui, vaguely spreading outward in all directions, seemed to slow down the boat's progress and render the sight of the travelers more insignificant than ever.

And they were, apart from a few bourgeois types in First Class, mostly working people, shopkeepers with their wives and children. It was customary in those days not to dress up for a trip, so nearly all of them were wearing old skullcaps or hats whose colors had faded, threadbare black suits, worn out by endless rubbing against counters, or jackets whose buttonholes had become stretched out from too much wear in the shops; here and there a wool jacket would be open to reveal a calico shirt, stained from coffee, beneath; tattered cravats were held in place by gilt tiepins; cheap woven slippers were held in place by trouser straps sewn onto cuffs; two or three less reputable-looking sorts, sporting canes of bamboo with leather straps, were casting surreptitious glances around them, and family men, wide-eyed, were asking questions. People were chatting—some standing up, some squatting on their luggage; others dozed in corners; many were eating. The deck was littered with walnut shells, cigar butts, peelings from pears, little crumbs of the sausage that had been brought on board wrapped in paper; three cabinet makers in their work blouses had taken up a station next to the canteen; a raggedly dressed harpist was resting, draped over his instrument; from time to time you could hear the coal being shoveled into the engine, a sudden outburst of voices, a great laugh—and all the while, the captain paced back and forth on the gangway, over and over, between the two paddle wheels. Frédéric, returning to his place, pushed open the grill door to First Class, disturbing a couple of hunters who, with their dogs, had seated themselves there.

It was like an apparition:

She was sitting there on the middle of the bench, all alone; or at any rate his eyes were so dazzled by the sight of her that he couldn't

see anyone else. Just as he passed her, she raised her head; he bent his shoulders in an involuntary slight bow; and when he was a little further away, but on the same side, he gazed back at her.

She was wearing a big straw hat with pink ribbons that fluttered in the breeze behind her. Her black hair, parted in the middle, formed two black bands that fell on either side of her face, just touching the tips of her thick eyebrows, as if pressing themselves amorously against her face. Her light muslin dress was covered with little dots, and it spread out around her in many folds. She was busy embroidering something; and it seemed as if her straight nose, her chin, her whole person had been made to stand out against the background of blue sky.

She remained in the same position, giving him the chance to make several passes around her, walking now from the right and now from the left, intent on concealing his purpose; then he planted himself right next to her umbrella and leaned against the bench, pretending to be watching a rowboat on the river.

Never before had he seen the splendor of such dark skin, the seductiveness of such a figure, nor, as the sunlight played across them, such fine fingers. He gazed down at her workbasket with astonishment, as if it were some extraordinary thing. What was her name, where did she live, what did she do, what had her past been like? He wanted to know every stick of furniture in her room, every dress she had worn, the people she spent her time with; and even the physical desire to possess her faded away under an even greater desire, an aching curiosity about her that was boundless.

A Black servant, her hair tied up in a headscarf, came forward leading a young girl by the hand; the girl, her eyes wet with tears, had just awakened; the young woman took her up onto her knees. Mademoiselle Marthe hadn't been a good girl, and here she was, almost seven; her mother wouldn't love her anymore; she was too spoiled. And Frédéric delighted in listening to such things, as if he were making a discovery, an acquisition.

He guessed the lady might be Andalusian, perhaps a Creole; and maybe she was bringing the Black servant along with her from the islands?

A long shawl with violet stripes had been draped over the brass railing, behind her back. She must have wrapped herself up in it

many times, out on the sea, on damp evenings, perhaps covering her feet with it, perhaps sleeping in it! And now the weight of its fringe was pulling the shawl down, and slipping down bit by bit, it was about to fall into the water when Frédéric made a quick leap forward and caught it. She spoke to him: "Thank you, monsieur."

Their eyes met.

"Wife, are you ready?" called out Arnoux, suddenly popping up in the hatch from the stairway.

Mademoiselle Marthe ran to him and, holding on tightly around his neck, tugged at his moustache. Notes from the harp sounded, and she wanted to hear the music; soon the musician, brought along by the Black servant, appeared. Arnoux recognized him as a former model; they spoke to each other familiarly, which surprised the onlookers. Finally, the harpist shook his long hair back over his shoulders, extended his arms, and began to play.

The song was an Oriental-style romance, all daggers, flowers, and stars. The man, dressed in rags, sang it with intensity; the engine's loud pulsings threw off the rhythm; he plucked his strings even harder; the strings made metallic sounds that were somehow like sobs, like the lamentations of a proud but vanquished lover. On both sides of the river, woods grew all the way down to the waterside; a cool breeze passed by; Madame Arnoux gazed vaguely off into the distance. When the music stopped, she blinked her eyes rapidly several times, as if she were emerging from a dream.

Humbly, the harpist approached the group. While Arnoux was digging in his pockets for some change, Frédéric reached toward the man's outstretched cap, his hand closed tightly, and opening it discreetly, dropped in a gold louis.[1] He was not moved by vanity to give such an offering in front of her; rather, it was a kind of benediction, one he associated with her, an almost religious impulse of the heart.

Arnoux, cordially indicating the way down below, invited Frédéric to come with them. Frédéric said that he had already had his lunch; in fact he was starving, but he no longer had so much as a centime to spend.

But then it occurred to him that he had as much right as anyone else to go down to the dining cabin below.

Seated at round tables, the bourgeois were all eating; a waiter with coffee was going from table to table; Monsieur and Madame Arnoux

were off in a corner to the right; he sat down on a long bench covered in velvet and picked up a newspaper that was lying there.

At Montereau, they would be taking the coach on to Châlons. Their trip to Switzerland would last a month. Madame Arnoux criticized her husband for spoiling their child. He whispered in her ear, some little compliment no doubt, because she smiled. Then he stood and twisted himself around to draw the curtain behind her head.

The ceiling, low and painted a flat white, harshly reflected the light. Frédéric, seated across the way from her, could make out the shadow cast by her eyelashes. She moistened her lips in her glass, and crumbled a little piece of bread in her fingers; the medallion of lapis lazuli dangling from her wrist clinked against her plate from time to time. But the others seated around her seemed not to notice.

Sometimes, through the portholes a boat could be seen gliding up alongside, either to pick up or drop off passengers. The people at the tables bent forward to see out the openings, and they named off the villages they were passing.

Arnoux complained about the food: he made a big fuss over the bill and managed to get it reduced. Then he took the young man forward to have a grog. But Frédéric soon came back to stand under the awning, in the place to which Madame Arnoux had returned. She was reading a thin volume with a gray cover. Sometimes the corners of her mouth would turn up, and her face light with pleasure. He envied the writer who had invented the things that so interested her. The longer he contemplated her, the more vividly he sensed the abyss that lay between her and him. He thought how soon he would have to leave her, and irrevocably, without having had so much as a word with her, leaving her with no memory of him at all!

To the right, a plain stretched off into the distance; to the left, grass-covered slopes climbed gently up a hillside, where the eye could make out vineyards and walnut trees, a mill somewhere amid all the verdure, and little paths zigzagging off beyond, up toward white rock that seemed to touch the sky itself. What happiness it would be to climb up there with her, side by side, an arm around her waist, while her skirts swept the yellow leaves along, while he listened to her voice, and all of it illuminated by the radiance of her eyes! The boat could stop, and all they would need do would be to disembark; such a simple thing, but it would in fact be an easier task to move the sun.

Soon a chateau came into view, with pointed roof and square turrets. A wide flower garden stretched out before it; avenues beneath tall lime trees led off into darkness, forming what looked like black vaults. Just as he pictured her walking beneath their bowers, a young woman and a young man appeared, standing on the chateau's steps, between orange trees planted in tubs. Then it all disappeared.

The little girl was playing near him. Frédéric wanted to give her a kiss. She hid behind her nurse; her mother scolded her for not being friendly to the gentleman who had rescued her shawl. Could this be an indirect overture?

Is she finally going to speak to me? he wondered.

Time was growing short. How to get an invitation to visit the Arnoux family? The best he could come up with was making some remark about the autumn colors, and adding, "Soon enough it'll be winter, the season of balls and dinners!"

But Arnoux was completely preoccupied with his luggage. The Surville shore came into view, its two bridges rapidly approaching, then a rope factory, then a line of low houses, down below which were great cauldrons of tar and heaps of wood chips; children played on the sand, doing cartwheels. Frédéric recognized a man in a jacket with long sleeves, and he called out to him: "Hurry up!"

They were arriving. He desperately sought Arnoux in the crowd of passengers, and when they met, the latter shook his hand. "My pleasure, my dear monsieur!"

When he was standing on the quay, Frédéric turned around. She was standing, right beside the guardrail. He gave her a look into which he tried desperately to pour his entire soul; she continued just to stand there, as if he had done nothing at all. Then, paying no attention to the greetings of Isidore, his servant: "Why didn't you bring the cart right up here?"

The man apologized.

"You're hopeless. Let me have some money."

And with that, he went off to an inn for a meal.

A quarter of an hour later, he contemplated taking a stroll right into the courtyard where the coaches were, as if by chance. Perhaps he would see her there? But what's the use? he thought.

And then the *américaine* took him off.[2] His mother didn't own both its horses. She had borrowed one from Monsieur Chambrion, the tax

collector, and had had it harnessed next to hers. Isidore had left the evening before, stopping at Bray until nightfall and then sleeping at Montereau, so that the animals, now refreshed, were trotting along briskly.

The stubble fields went on and on, endlessly. Two rows of trees bordered the road, and one heap of stones followed another; and bit by bit, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, Ablon, Châtillon, Corbeil, and all the rest of his journey came back to him now, so vivid in his memory that he could pick out new details, new and even more intimate touches; beneath the lowest flounce of her dress her foot appeared, clad in a thin, chestnut-colored silk boot; the canvas awning over her head formed a wide canopy, and the little red tassels on its fringe trembled a little in the perpetual breeze.

She was like the women in romantic novels. He wouldn't want to add a thing or take away any detail from her. The universe had abruptly grown much larger. She was the single point of light, the point where all things converged; and now, rocking gently in the coach, his eyes half closed, his gaze directed up toward the clouds, he gave himself up to a dreamlike, infinite joy.

At Bray, he didn't wait while they brought out the horses' oats, instead setting off on foot by himself. Arnoux had called her "Marie"! He shouted out at the top of his voice: "Marie!" His voice was carried off in the air.

The western sky was aflame with a purple sunset. Big stacks of wheat rose from the stubble fields, casting giant shadows. A farm dog was barking, somewhere far away. He shivered, gripped by an anxiety that had no cause.

When Isidore caught up with him, Frédéric got up in the driver's seat. The moment of weakness had passed. He was fully resolved now to get himself introduced, no matter what it took, at the Arnoux home and to become one of their intimates. Their household circle must be interesting, and besides, he liked Arnoux; beyond that, who knew? At that, the blood rushed to his face; his temples throbbed, and he cracked his whip, shaking the reins, driving the horses with such intensity that the old coachman kept saying, "Not so fast! Not so fast! You'll wear them out."

Bit by bit, Frédéric calmed down, and began to listen to what the domestic was saying to him.

They were all awaiting monsieur with the greatest impatience. Mademoiselle Louise had cried, begging to be allowed to come along in the coach.

"Who's Mademoiselle Louise?"

"You know, Monsieur Roque—his little girl."

"Oh, yes—I forgot," Frédéric replied offhandedly.

Soon the two horses really were worn out. Both of them were limping; and nine o'clock sounded when he arrived at the Place d'Armes, in front of his mother's house. This spacious house, with its garden in the back open to the countryside, enhanced the local status enjoyed by Madame Moreau, the most respected person in the neighborhood.

She came from an old aristocratic family, now extinct. Her husband, a plebian her parents had forced her to marry, had died of a sword wound while she was pregnant, leaving her an encumbered fortune. She received guests three times a week, and from time to time she gave lavish dinners. But the number of candles was carefully calculated in advance, and she awaited her farmers' rent payments with impatience. This financial difficulty, which she tried to hide as if it were a vice, made her a serious woman. Her virtues, however, were exercised with no taint of prudery or bitterness. Her slightest charities seemed like great generosities. People consulted her on choosing a domestic, educating a young girl, making preserves; and Monseigneur himself came to her during his episcopal tours.

Madame Moreau, who nursed a high ambition for her son, didn't like hearing anyone criticize the government, out of a kind of anticipatory prudence. The young man would need protectors at first; thereafter, his own abilities might lead him to the Council of State, an ambassadorship, a ministry.[3] His triumphs at the school in Sens legitimized her pride; he had carried off the highest prize.

When he entered the drawing room, where the armchairs and sofas had been arranged to form a semicircle around the fireplace, everyone there stood up to embrace and make a great fuss over him; Monsieur Gamblin immediately asked him his opinions regarding Madame Lafarge.[4] This trial, the hottest topic of the day, never failed to lead to a heated argument; Madame Moreau cut it off, disappointing Monsieur Gamblin, who thought the subject a good and useful one for a young man who would soon be going in to the law, and he left the drawing room in a foul mood.

Nothing comes as a surprise when it's a matter of one of old Roque's friends! From Roque they passed on to the subject of Monsieur Dambreuse, who had just purchased the Fortelle estate. But the Preceptor drew Frédéric off to one side, to find out what he thought of Monsieur Guizot's latest work.[5] Everyone wanted to know what Frédéric had been doing; and Madame Benoît found a graceful way into the subject by asking him for news of his uncle. How was that fine relative of his? Nobody heard from him nowadays. Didn't he have some sort of cousin in America?

The cook announced that monsieur's soup was served. People began tactfully to leave. Then, when they were alone in the room, his mother asked him quietly, "And so?"

The old man had received him very cordially, but without letting on what his intentions were.

Madame Moreau sighed.

"Where is she right now?" he thought.

Their coach would be rolling along, and no doubt wrapped up in the shawl, she would be leaning her beautiful head against the lining of the carriage.

They were on the stairs going to their bedrooms when a boy from the Cygne de la Croix brought in a note.

"What is it?"

"It's Deslauriers. He needs me," he said.

"Oh, your great friend!" said Madame Moreau with a kind of sneer. "He picks his times well, doesn't he!"

Frédéric hesitated. But friendship won out. He picked up his hat.

"Well, at least don't stay out too late," said his mother.

II

The father of Charles Deslauriers, an infantry captain who had resigned his commission in 1818, had returned to Nogent in order to get married and, with the dowry money in hand, had purchased a position as a bailiff, which earned him barely enough to live on. Embittered by the long injustice of it all, suffering from his old wounds, and endlessly mourning the loss of the Empire, he spewed out all his seething rage on those around him. Few children have been beaten as much as his son was, and the mother, when she tried to intervene, was treated just

as roughly. But despite the blows, the boy never gave in. At length the Captain put the boy in his office, and there he kept him all day long, bent over a desk and copying out documents; this went on so long that the boy's right shoulder grew visibly stronger than his left.

In 1833, upon the request of the presiding judge, the Captain sold his post. His wife died of cancer. He moved to Dijon; next he set himself up as a *marchand d'hommes*[6] in Troyes; and having managed to get Charles a half scholarship, he sent the boy to the school at Sens, which is where Frédéric met him. But the one was twelve and the other fifteen; and besides, the two were separated by a thousand differences in temperament and background.

Frédéric possessed all sort of provisions, which he kept in his chest of drawers, highly desirable things, like a grooming case, for example. He liked to sleep late in the mornings, to watch the swallows, to read plays; in short, he sorely missed the comforts of his home, finding school life harsh.

But to the bailiff's son it seemed good. He worked so hard and so well that by the end of his second year he was promoted to the next class. However, because of his poverty, or his quarrelsome manner, he was surrounded by thinly veiled hostility. But when a servant once called him the son of a pauper, right in the middle of the school's playground, he flew at the man's throat and would have killed him if three teachers hadn't been there to pull him off. Frédéric was rapt with admiration, and he threw his arms around the boy. From that day on, they were best friends. The affection of the big boy no doubt flattered the vanity of the younger, and the elder happily accepted Frédéric's devotion.

Charles's father left him at school during the vacations, and a translation of Plato that happened to be lying open made an enthusiast of him. He began studying metaphysics; and he made rapid progress, for he approached it with the energy of youth and the pride of a flowering intellect; Jouffroy, Cousin, Laromiguière, Malebranche, the Scots—he went through everything the library held.[7] He'd had to steal the key at one point in order to get his books.

Frédéric's distractions were of the less serious kind. He drew the genealogy of Christ from a sculpted doorpost in the Rue des Trois-Rois, then he sketched the cathedral's great portal. After reading medieval plays, he turned to memoirs: Froissart, Comines, Pierre de l'Estoile, Brantôme.

Reading these books brought such powerful images into his mind that he felt the urge to reproduce them. He dreamed of one day becoming the Walter Scott of France. Meanwhile, Deslauriers was contemplating a vast system of philosophy that would have the most far-reaching applications.

They talked all this over during their recreation periods, in the courtyard, in front of the moral motto painted underneath the clock; they whispered about it during chapel, right in front of the statue of Saint Louis; they dreamed about it in the dormitory, which had a view of a cemetery. On hiking days, they would fall back behind the others, talking interminably.

They talked about what they would do later on, when they had left the school. They planned, first, a great journey, to be financed by money from Frédéric's inheritance when he came of age. After that, they would return to Paris, where they would work together, always at each other's side—and, as a respite from their studies, they would have love affairs with princesses in boudoirs of satin, or dazzling orgies with famous courtesans. But their flights of hopefulness were followed by doubts. After great flights of verbose fantasy, they would fall into deep, long silences.

On summer nights, after long walks along gravel paths by the vineyards, or on the main road out in the open countryside, where the wheat fields waved in the sun, while the scent of angelica blew over them in the breeze, they would feel a sensation so powerful it was almost stifling, and they would stretch out full length on their backs, giddy, intoxicated. The others, in their shirtsleeves, would be playing prisoners' base or flying kites.[8] When the monitor called to them they started back, passing gardens through which ran little streams and along boulevards, in the shadows cast by ancient walls; their footsteps rang out along the deserted streets; the gate would open, they would go back up the stair; and they felt the kind of melancholy that follows upon a great debauch.

The headmaster said he thought they overstimulated each other. But in fact, if Frédéric did good work in his classes, it was only because of the exhortations from his friend; and for the 1837 vacation he brought him home to his mother.

Madame Moreau hadn't liked the young man. He ate prodigiously, refused to go to church on Sunday, and held republican opinions;

worse, she felt sure that he had taken her son to houses of ill repute. She had kept a close watch on their relationship—and that, of course, only strengthened their friendship; their farewells were mournful when, the next year, Deslauriers left to attend law school in Paris. Frédéric fully expected to go and join him there.

When they met now, they had not seen each other for two years; once they got done embracing each other, they went off to walk the bridges, where they could speak freely.

The Captain, who now was running a billiards parlor in Villenauxe, had flown into a red rage when his son asked for an accounting concerning his inheritance from his mother; he proceeded to cut off his income altogether. Having no money, and hoping later to compete for a professorship at the law school, Deslauriers had accepted a position at Troyes as head clerk to a lawyer there. By scrimping, he could put away four thousand francs; and then, even if he never got anything from his mother's estate, he would still have enough to work on his own for three years while he waited for a post to open up. This meant that he and Frédéric had to abandon their old plan of living together in the capital, for the present at least.

Frédéric looked down. This was the first of his dreams to be crushed.

"Cheer up," said the Captain's son, "we've got lots of years ahead of us yet—we're young. I'll join up with you later! Don't let it bother you!"

He shook Frédéric by the hands and, to distract him, began questioning him about his trip.

Frédéric didn't have much to report. But when he remembered Madame Arnoux, his discouragement evaporated. Held back by a certain diffidence, he didn't speak about her, but instead began talking at length about Arnoux himself, the things he'd said, his ways of doing things, his connection; and Deslauriers vigorously urged him to cultivate the acquaintance.

Frédéric hadn't written anything at all lately; his literary opinions had changed. Now passion was the most important criterion—so Werther, René, Franck, Lara, Lélia, and other more mediocre characters all generated the same enthusiasm in him.[9] Sometimes he thought that only music was capable of expressing his inner tumults, and then he would dream of symphonies; sometimes the surface of things fascinated him, and he wanted to paint them. He had, however,

composed some poetry; Deslauriers thought it was very fine, but he didn't ask to hear any more.

As for Deslauriers himself, metaphysics no longer attracted him. Political economy and the Revolution were all he thought about. He was, at present, a tall devil of a man, twenty-two years old, skinny, with a wide mouth and a determined air. On that evening he was wearing a shabby overcoat of cheap, thick cloth; his shoes were white with dust, for he had come on foot from Villenauxe specifically to see Frédéric.

Isidore came up to them. Madame would like monsieur to come back home, and thinking it was getting cold, she had sent along monsieur's overcoat.

"But stay, will you!" said Deslauriers.

So they continued to stroll from one end to the other of the two bridges leading to the narrow island that was formed by the canal and the river.

When they approached Nogent, they faced a row of houses all of which sagged a little. On the right, the church appeared behind the wooden sawmills, their sluice-gates closed; and on the left, hedges ran all the way down the bank, forming the borders of just-visible gardens. But in the direction of Paris, the highway went down the hill in a straight line and the meadows stretched out until they were lost in the distance, fading into the evening mists. The odor of damp leaves rose up to them; from the sluice, a hundred yards away, the falling water murmured gently with that heavy, sweet sound that waves make in the darkness.

Deslauriers stopped and said, "All these fine people sleeping away so peacefully—what a joke! Just wait: a new '89 is on the way! We're sick to death of constitutions, charters, subtleties and nuances, lies! Oh, if I only had a newspaper of my own, or another kind of platform, how I'd shake all this awake! But to start up something like that, you need money! What a curse it is, being the son of a tavern-keeper and having to waste away my youth trying to earn my bread!"

He lowered his head, biting his lips and shivering in his thin overcoat.

Frédéric threw half his overcoat over his friend's shoulders. It thus enveloped the two of them, and gripping each other around the waist, they walked on side by side.

"How am I supposed to live down there in Paris without you?" Frédéric asked. His friend's bitterness had revived his melancholy. "I could have accomplished something with a woman who loved me. . . . What's so funny? Love is the lifeblood, or so to speak, the oxygen of genius. Extraordinary passions produce sublime works. I refuse to go searching for the woman who's right for me. And anyway, if I did find her, she'd reject me. I belong to the race of the disinherited,[10] and I'm going to die with a jewel still inside me, and never know whether it was just a rhinestone or a real diamond."

Someone's shadow stretched out before them along the pavement, just as they heard these words: "At your service, messieurs!"

The person who spoke was a little man, dressed in a roomy brown overcoat and a cap, under the visor of which protruded a pointed nose.

"Monsieur Roque?" said Frédéric.

"Himself!" said the voice.

This Nogent citizen justified his presence by explaining that he was coming back from having inspected some wolf traps in his garden by the river. "So you're back among us? Excellent! I heard about it from my little girl. You're in good health, I trust? And you'll be with us for a while?"

And he went on his way, feeling put off, no doubt, by Frédéric's unenthusiastic welcome.

Madame Moreau, in fact, did not have much to do with him; old Roque cohabited with his maidservant, and he wasn't held in much respect, though he was Monsieur Dambreuse's steward and the election *croupier.*[11]

"Dambreuse—the banker who lives on the Rue d'Anjou?" asked Deslauriers.[12] "Do you know what you ought to do, old friend?"

Isidore interrupted them yet again. He had orders to bring Frédéric back, with no excuses this time. Madame was growing worried about his absence.

"Yes, yes, he'll go soon," said Deslauriers; "he'll get his sleep." And when the servant had gone: "You ought to get the old man to introduce you to the Dambreuses; there's nothing more useful than frequenting the houses of the wealthy! You have a black suit and some white gloves, so put them to use! You need to find a way into that world! Then later on, you can bring me along with you. A millionaire—think of it! Manage to make him like you, and his wife too. Become her lover!"

Frédéric protested.

"But I'm only suggesting classic moves, aren't I?" said Deslauriers. "Think of Rastignac in the *Comédie Humaine*![13] You'll succeed, I guarantee it."

Frédéric so completely believed in Deslauriers that he felt somewhat shaken, and now, forgetting Madame Arnoux, or perhaps seeking some way of including her in the fantasy future the other man was painting for him, he couldn't help but break into a smile.

"And one last piece of advice: pass your exams! A degree is always a good thing. And put all your Catholic and satanic poets behind you—their philosophy is about as current as the twelfth century. Your pose of despair is frankly stupid. Some who went on to be very great men had rougher beginnings than yours, Mirabeau for one.[14] Anyway, you and I won't be separated for all that long. I'll try to get my tightwad father to cough up some money. I need to get back now, so farewell! Can I borrow a hundred sous, so I can pay for the dinner I ate?"

Frédéric gave him ten francs, all the money he'd managed to get earlier from Isidore.[15]

Only a few yards from the bridges, on the left bank, a lantern shone in the attic window of a low-slung house. When Deslauriers noticed it, he doffed his hat dramatically and pronounced: "O Venus, queen of the skies, your servants are we! But alas, Penury is the mother of Wisdom. And God knows we've had our characters slandered enough about that!"

This reference to an adventure the two had shared lifted both their spirits. They laughed loudly, walking through the streets.

Then, after paying his tab at the inn, Deslauriers escorted Frédéric to the Hôtel-Dieu crossroads—and then, after a long final embrace, the two friends separated.

III

In Paris two months later, Frédéric got down from a coach one morning on the Rue Coq Héron and began thinking of making his great visit.

Chance had worked in his favor. Old Roque had come to him with a whole sheaf of papers, asking him to take them personally to Monsieur Dambreuse's home; and he added a personal, unsealed note to the bundle, introducing his young Nogent neighbor.

Madame Moreau had seemed surprised by the plan. Frédéric concealed the pleasure it gave him.

Monsieur Dambreuse's real name was the Comte d'Ambreuse; but from 1825 on,[16] he had gradually dropped both his title and his party, turning instead toward the world of industry, and with connections in every office and a finger in every enterprise, never missing an opportunity, sharp and subtle as a Greek and hard-working as an Auvergnat, he had amassed a fortune that people said was considerable; moreover, he was an officer of the Legion of Honor, member of the general council for the Aube region, a *député,* and would perhaps be made a peer of France one day[17]; always ready to help, he exhausted the government with his constant requests for aid, for medals of honor, for tobacconist licenses; and in his little battles with those in power, he tended to lean center-left. His wife, the pretty Madame Dambreuse, so frequently cited in the fashion magazines, presided over various charitable organizations. By dint of cajoling the duchesses, she soothed the rancor of the noble faubourg,[18] and she let it be thought that Monsieur Dambreuse might still one day repent and begin to do services for their tribe.

Approaching this house made Frédéric nervous. "I should have worn my suit. Will they invite me to next week's ball? What will they say to me?"

His self-confidence returned when he reflected that, after all, Monsieur Dambreuse was really only a bourgeois, and he leaped lightly out of his cabriolet and onto the sidewalk of the Rue d'Anjou.

When he had pushed open one of the two porte cocheres, he crossed the courtyard, walked up the steps, and stepped into a vestibule paved with colored marble.

A double staircase, with red carpet and brass stair-rods, led straight up between high walls of polished stucco. A banana tree stood at the foot of the stairs, its broad leaves drooping down to touch the velvet of the banisters. Two bronze candelabras supported globes of porcelain, hanging by little chains; the yawning vents of the radiators seemed to sigh and exhale a stuffy air, and nothing could be heard except the ticking of a large clock, standing at the other end of the vestibule, beneath a panoply.

A bell rang; a valet appeared, showing Frédéric into a small room where he could distinguish two strongboxes with pigeonholes, filled

with files. Monsieur Dambreuse was seated between them, writing at a roll-top desk.

He quickly ran through Roque's letter of introduction, then used his penknife to slit open the cloth holding the sheaf of documents and began to examine them.

From a distance, because of his trim build, he could have been taken for a man still young. But his thinning white hair, his frail limbs, and above all the extraordinary pallor of his face implied a worn-out constitution. But his gray-green eyes, colder than glass, showed that he still retained a pitiless strength. His cheekbones were prominent, and his hands bony.

Finally he stood up, addressing a few questions to the young man concerning mutual acquaintances, concerning Nogent, concerning his studies; then he dismissed him with a bow. Frédéric left by a different corridor, and he found himself out in the lower courtyard, by the coach houses.

A black horse was harnessed to the blue coupé parked by the front steps. The door opened, a woman got in, and the coach, with a rumbling sound, moved off over the sandy courtyard.

Frédéric, coming from the other side, was passing through the porte cochere just as the coach got there. There wasn't enough room for both him and the vehicle, so he had to wait. The young woman leaned out of the window and spoke in a low tone to the concierge. Frédéric could only see her back, which was covered by a violet cloak. But he could observe that the coach's interior was lined with blue rep, with trimmings of silk and fringe. The woman's clothes filled up the space; a scent of iris came from the little quilted box, a vague fragrance of feminine elegance. The coachman snapped the reins, the horse brushed abruptly against the corner pillar, and the whole vision disappeared.

Frédéric made his way back on foot, walking down the boulevards. He wished he'd been able to get a better view of Madame Dambreuse.

A little further up from Rue Montmartre, a number of carriages had got tangled up in the street, causing Frédéric to turn his head; and there, on the other side of the street, he saw on a shop a marble plaque:

JACQUES ARNOUX

Why hadn't he thought about her till now? It was Deslauriers's fault, and he made his way toward the shop, but he didn't go in; he was waiting for Her to appear.

The tall plate-glass windows offered the passerby a skillfully arranged array of statuettes, drawings, prints, catalogs, and various numbers of the newspaper *L'Art industriel;* the price of a subscription was repeated in letters on the door, the initials of the publisher decoratively and prominently placed. Against the walls one could see large paintings gleaming with varnish and, farther back, two chests heaped with porcelains, bronzes, and other tempting curiosities; between them was a small stairway leading to a thick curtain; the chandelier of old Dresden porcelain, the green carpet on the floor, and the marquetry table made the interior look more like a drawing room than a shop.

Frédéric pretended to be examining the drawings in the window, and then, after an infinity of hesitations, he finally went in.

An employee raised the curtain, and replied to his question that monsieur would not be back "in the shop" before five o'clock. But if there were a message he could pass on . . .

"No! I'll come back," Frédéric replied softly.

The days after this were spent looking for a place to live; and he finally decided on a room on the third floor of a furnished hotel on the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe.[19]

A brand-new blotter under his arm, he attended the first lecture of the term. Three hundred young men, all of them hatless, filled an amphitheater where an old man in a red robe expatiated in a monotone; pens scraped on paper. Frédéric discovered there the dusty air of the schoolroom, the same kind of chair and the same kind of boredom! For two weeks he continued to attend but quit before they had even got to Article 3 of the Civil Code, and he turned his back on the *Institutes* at *Summa divisio personarum.*[20]

The joys he had promised himself failed to materialize; and when he had exhausted the resources of a lending library, gone through all the collections at the Louvre, and gone to the theater several evenings in a row, he fell into a bottomless lethargy.

A thousand new things only added to his melancholy. He had to keep track of his laundry and submit to the concierge, a boor with the look of a male nurse who came in to make his bed in the morning,

muttering and reeking of alcohol. His room—its sole ornament an alabaster clock—displeased him too. The walls were thin; he could hear students making punch, laughing, and singing.

Tired of the solitary life he was living, he looked up one of his old friends, Baptiste Martinon, finding him living in a bourgeois boardinghouse in the Rue Saint-Jacques and earnestly studying legal procedure in front of a coal fire. Opposite him sat a woman in a calico dress, darning socks.

Martinon was what people called a fine-looking man: big, a little chubby, with regular features and protruding, pale blue eyes; his father, a big farmer, wanted the son to become a magistrate—and so, anxious to appear serious, he kept his beard neatly clipped.

Since Frédéric's troubles had no rational basis or cause, and since he could not lay claim to any particular hardship, Martinon could not comprehend his lamentations about his life. As for him, he went off to school every morning, took a stroll afterward through the Luxembourg gardens, treated himself to a demitasse of coffee every evening, and, with his fifteen hundred francs a year and the love of this working-class woman, he considered himself perfectly happy.

"He calls that happiness!" Frédéric exclaimed to himself.

He had made another acquaintance at the school, a Monsieur de Cisy, offspring of a grand family and who seemed almost like a girl, so gentle were his manners. Monsieur de Cisy studied design, especially loving the Gothic. Many times the two went together to the Sainte-Chapelle and Notre-Dame, but the young patrician showed a deeply impoverished intellect. Everything surprised him: guffawing at the slightest pleasantry, showing so complete a naïveté that Frédéric supposed he must be joking, but soon decided that no, the man was a fool.

Thus there was no one to whom he could really express his feelings; and he kept waiting for an invitation from the Dambreuses.

On New Year's he left a card at their house, but he received none from them.

He returned to L'Art industriel.

Finally, on his third visit to the place, he saw Arnoux, who was busy arguing with a group of five or six people and scarcely returned his greeting; Frédéric was hurt. But he continued to seek out a way to get to Her.

At first he thought he would show up at the shop often and haggle over the pictures. Then he thought he would slip some "very powerful" articles into the paper's mailbox, which would undoubtedly lead to a relationship. Maybe the best thing would be to go straight for the goal, to come right out and declare his love? Then he composed a letter of some twelve pages, full of lyrical movements and apostrophes; but he tore it up, did nothing, attempted nothing—utterly immobilized by the fear of failure.

Over Arnoux's shop, the three windows that ran across the front of the second floor were illuminated every evening. Silhouettes could be seen moving around behind them; that one was hers—and Frédéric went far out of his way to come here and gaze at those windows, and to contemplate that silhouette.

A Black woman passed him one day, walking in the Tuileries, holding a little girl by the hand; she reminded him of Madame Arnoux's Black servant. She must come here, just like all the others; every time he crossed the Tuileries, his heart beat rapidly in hopes of encountering her, and on sunny days, he would extend his walk all the way to the end of the Champs Élysées.

Women sitting nonchalantly in their carriages, their veils fluttering in the breeze, passed close by him, their horses clopping steadily along, swaying ever so slightly, just enough to make the varnished leather of their harnesses creak. The number of carriages continued to increase, and, slowing down past the Rond-Point, they took up the entire street. Manes brushed up next to manes, lanterns to lanterns; steel stirrups, silver curb chains, brass buckles gleamed for a second among the knee breeches, the white gloves, and the furs draped over the coats of arms on carriage doors. He felt lost in an alien world. His gaze traveled from one feminine head to another; and vague similarities always brought him back to the memory of Madame Arnoux. He imagined her, among so many petite coupés, in one like Madame Dambreuse's.

But the sun was setting, and a cold wind was whisking up little whirlwinds of dust. The coachmen dipped their chins down into their cravats, and the wheels began rolling more rapidly, the macadam screeching beneath them; and all the carriages descended the long avenue at a swift trot, jostling each other, passing each other, spacing out from each other, and, finally, at the Place de la Concorde,

dispersing. Behind the Tuileries, the sky had taken on the hue of slate. The trees in the gardens formed huge masses, their tops tinted a purplish blue. The gas lamps were lit; and the Seine, greenish for its entire length, broke into a shimmery silver where the bridges' pillars met the water.

Frédéric went off to get dinner, paying forty-three sous at a restaurant on the Rue de la Harpe. He looked with disdain at the old mahogany counter, the stained napkins, the filthy silverware, and the hats hung up on the wall. The people around him were students like him. They talked about their professors, their mistresses. As if he cared about professors! As if he had a mistress! To avoid their cheery talk, he arrived as late as possible. All the tables were strewn with food scraps. The two waiters, exhausted, slept off in a corner, and the smell of cooking, lamp oil, and tobacco filled the deserted room.

Then he made his way slowly through the streets. The street lamps swung back and forth, their long, yellow reflections making the mud in the street seem to tremble. Shadows, carrying umbrellas, went slipping by on the sidewalks. The paving stones were slick from the evening mist, and he felt the damp darkness wrapping itself around him and sinking deep into his heart.

A kind of remorse taking hold of him, he returned to his courses. But since by now he knew nothing about the issues being discussed, even the simplest things were difficult for him.

He began writing a novel, to be titled *Silvio, Son of the Fisherman.* It was set in Venice. The main character was himself; the heroine, Madame Arnoux. She was called Antonia—and, in order to have her, he murdered a number of gentlemen, burned down part of the city, and sang to her from below her balcony, where curtains of red damask, like the ones on the Montmartre boulevard, trembled in the breeze. But everything he wrote sounded like other novels, which discouraged him; he gave it up, and his lethargy deepened further.

Then he begged Deslauriers to come and share his room. He would find a way for them to live on the two thousand francs from his allowance; anything would be better than this miserable existence. But Deslauriers couldn't leave Troyes quite yet, and he urged Frédéric to distract himself and spend some time with Sénécal.

Sénécal was a mathematics tutor, a headstrong man with republican convictions, something of a future Saint-Just, said the clerk.[21]

Frédéric climbed the five flights of stairs to visit him three different times, without ever receiving a visit in return. He stopped going.

He sought amusement. He attended the Opéra balls. Those wild gatherings froze him the minute he walked in the door. Besides, he was always restrained by the fear of getting into money troubles, and he imagined that a supper with some domino would involve much expense, though it would be a great adventure.[22]

But he continued to think there ought to be someone who loved him. Some mornings he would awaken with a hope-filled heart and would dress carefully, as if on his way to a rendezvous, and he would go out walking endlessly around Paris. With every woman he saw walking ahead of him, or who was walking toward him, he would say to himself: "There she is!" And every time was only a new disappointment. The idea of Madame Arnoux intensified and fortified his desire. He might cross paths with her; and as a way of approaching her, he would imagine various complications, various perils from which he would rescue her.

And so the days rolled on, repeating the same boredoms, the same habits he'd acquired. He would flip through the brochures under the Odéon arcade, or go read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*[23] in a café, or slip into a classroom in the Collège de France and listen to a lecture on China or on political economy. Every week he wrote long letters to Deslauriers, dined once or twice with Martinon, went to see something with Monsieur de Cisy.

He rented a piano and composed German-style waltzes.

One evening at the Palais-Royal theater, he caught sight of Arnoux in a box near the stage, accompanied by a woman. Was it she? The green taffeta screen, drawn across the edge of the box, obscured her face. Finally, when the curtain was raised, the screen was withdrawn, revealing that the person was tall, around thirty, somewhat faded, with generous lips that, when they parted for her laugh, revealed splendid teeth. She was chatting familiarly with Arnoux, rapping his fingers from time to time with her fan. Then a young blonde came and sat between them, her eyes a little reddened, as if she'd been crying. Arnoux talked exclusively to her now, half leaning against her shoulder, while she listened without responding. Frédéric racked his brains trying to figure out what the situation was with these women, both of them modestly dressed in dark gowns with their collars turned down.

When the show was over, he hurried out into the corridor. The crowd filled it from edge to edge. Arnoux, ahead of him, was making his way down the staircase, one step at a time, giving an arm to each of the women.

Suddenly he was illuminated by a gas lamp, and Frédéric saw that he was wearing a crepe band around his hat. Could she possibly have died? The idea so tortured him that he rushed the next morning to L'Art industriel, and having made a quick purchase of one of the engravings in the showcase, he asked the clerk how Monsieur Arnoux was doing.

The boy replied: "He's doing just fine!"

Frédéric went pale as he continued. "And madame?"

"Madame too!"

Frédéric forgot to take the engraving with him.

Winter came to an end. He felt less downhearted in the springtime, got himself ready to take his exam, and having passed with a mediocre result, left for Nogent.

He deliberately did not go to Troyes to visit his friend, in order to avoid his mother's comments. When the new school term began, he changed his lodgings, taking a two-room apartment on the Quai Napoléon, which he furnished. He no longer hoped for an invitation from the Dambreuses; his grand passion for Madame Arnoux was beginning to cool.

IV

One morning in December, on his way to his course in procedure, it seemed to him that the Rue Saint-Jacques was more animated than usual. Students were pouring out of the cafés, or were calling to each other from the windows of one house to another. The shopkeepers, standing outside on the sidewalks, looked nervous; shutters began closing; and when Frédéric got to the Rue Soufflot, he saw a great crowd gathered around the Panthéon.

Young people in groups ranging from five to a dozen were walking about arm in arm, approaching other, larger groups assembling here and there; at the back of the square, up against the railings, workingmen in smocks were exhorting the crowd while policemen, their tricorner hats cocked over one ear, were stalking back and forth by

the walls, their hands behind their backs, making the pavement ring with the sound of their heavy boots. Everything seemed mysterious, astonishing; people were apparently awaiting something; everyone seemed to have a question on their lips.

Frédéric found himself standing next to a blond young man with an affable air, wearing a moustache and goatee like a fashion plate from the days of Louis XIII. He asked what had caused all this disorder.

"I don't know a thing about it," the other said, "and neither do any of them! That's just their way right now! What a farce!" And he burst into laughter.

The petitions for reform, which were being circulated among the National Guard, along with Humann's census and some other recent events had, over the past six months, led to similar inexplicable mob scenes in Paris; they had become so common that the press no longer covered them.[24]

"The whole thing lacks contour and color," Frédéric's neighbor continued, "and verily, verily, my lord, everything's going downhill! Now, take the fine old epoch of Louis XI, to say nothing of Benjamin Constant—then, students had more rebellion in them. But yea and forsooth, they look to me about as peaceful as sheep, nitwits, like a pack of grocers. God above! And there they are, what people call the Modern Student!"

He spread his arms out wide, like Frédéric Lemaître in *Robert Macaire.*[25] "O modern students, you have my blessing!"

He turned to apostrophize a rag picker who was rooting through some discarded oyster shells outside a wine merchant's shop: "And you, my good man, are also one of the Modern Students?"

The old man looked up, revealing a hideous face in which a red nose and two drink-sodden, confused eyes peered out from above a gray beard.

"Ah, no! You seem, rather, like one of those 'baleful men one finds in diverse groups, strewing gold coins freely . . .'. Oh, strew, great patriarch, strew! Corrupt me with the treasures of Albion! *Are you English?* I will not reject the gifts of Atraxerxes! Come, let us parley a while re the Customs Union."[26]

Frédéric felt someone touch him on the shoulder; he turned. It was Martinon, shockingly pale.

"So!" he said, heaving a great sigh, "another riot."

He was afraid of being compromised by being seen there, and he complained about it. What made him especially nervous was the sight of men in smocks, thinking they might belong to secret societies.

"I don't believe there are any secret societies," said the young man with the moustache. "That's just an old trick the government uses to keep the middle class scared."

Martinon begged him to lower his voice, afraid the police might overhear.

"So you believe in police, do you? Well, how do you know, monsieur, that I'm not a police spy myself?"

He accompanied that with such a facial expression that Martinon, now very worried, needed some time to realize he was joking. The crowd was pushing them along, and by now all three of them had been forced up onto the little stairway that leads, via a corridor, to the new amphitheater.

Soon the crowd divided, all on its own; heads were being bared; they greeted the illustrious professor Samuel Rondelot, who—wrapped up in his large overcoat, waving his silver spectacles in the air, and panting from his asthma—was making his way to the front, with measured steps, to teach his class. This man was one of the glories of the nineteenth century, the rival of the Zacharies and the Ruhdorffs.[27] His new dignity (he had been made a peer of France) made no change at all in his manner. Everyone knew he was poor, and he commanded the greatest respect.

But even so, from somewhere in the crowd came shouts:

"Down with Guizot!"

"Down with Pritchard!"[28]

"Down with Louis-Philippe!"

The crowd began surging, and pressing up against the closed gate of the courtyard, it prevented the professor from going any farther. He was stopped at the foot of the stairway. Soon he could be seen standing on the lowest of the three steps. He was speaking; the tumult of the crowd made it impossible to hear him. Even though he had been beloved just a moment ago, he was hated now, because he represented Authority. Every time he tried to make himself heard, the crowd's cries drowned him out. He made a sweeping gesture, inviting the students to follow him. Universal jeers were the response.

He shrugged his shoulders with disdain and pushed his way into the corridor. Martinon had taken advantage of the moment to disappear.

"What a coward!" exclaimed Frédéric.

"A prudent man!" said the other.

The crowd broke out into applause. They saw the retreat of the professor as a victory for themselves. Every window above was filled with curious faces. Some began to sing the Marseillaise; others proposed going to Béranger's.[29]

"No—to Laffitte's!"

"To Chateaubriand's!"

"To Voltaire's!" shouted the young man with the moustache.[30]

The police were trying to move through the crowd, saying as gently and pleasantly as they could: "Make room, gentlemen—please leave now, go home."

Somebody shouted out: "Down with the butchers!"

This insult was the usual one, ever since the troubles of September.[31] Everyone took it up now. They booed, they hissed the guardians of public order; the latter began to pale; one of them could resist no longer, and when a small young man came right up and laughed in his face, the policeman pushed the man back so forcefully that he fell backward about five feet, landing on his back in front of the wine merchant's shop. Everyone scattered; but almost instantly the policeman was on the ground himself, knocked down by a kind of Hercules, whose hair stuck out from beneath his oilcloth cap like a bundle of flax.

Having stopped for a while at the corner of the Rue Saint-Jacques, he had quickly set down the large box he was carrying and leaped onto the policeman, and now, having him down, began raining heavy blows on the man's face. The other policemen rushed over to the rescue, but the fierce young man was so strong that it took a good five of them to get him off. Two pulled at him by the collar, another two by his arms, and a fifth was kneeing him in the kidneys, and they all were shouting, calling him criminal, murderer, rioter. His chest bare and his clothes in tatters, he insisted on his innocence; but, he said, he couldn't stand by and watch a boy get beaten up.

"My name is Dussardier! I work at Valinçart Brothers, lace and notions, Rue de Cléry. Where's my box? I need my box!" Then he repeated: "Dussardier! . . . Rue de Cléry. My box!"

But soon he calmed down and, with a stoical air, allowed himself to be conducted to the station on the Rue Descartes. A torrent of people followed him, Frédéric and the young man with the moustache right behind him, full of admiration for the shop clerk and indignant about the violence of Power.

The farther they went, the more the crowd thinned.

The policemen turned back to face them from time to time with ferocious expressions; and when the rowdiest found there was nothing for them to do, and the curious found nothing more to see, bit by bit they all drifted away. As those remaining went along, some passersby looked Dussardier over and made insulting remarks. An old woman in her doorway cried out that he had stolen a loaf of bread; that injustice only augmented the irritation the two friends felt. Finally they found themselves in front of the police station. There were no more than about twenty people left, and the sight of the soldiers was enough to disperse them.

Frédéric and his comrade boldly demanded to see the man who had just been put in prison. And when the duty officer threatened to throw them in jail themselves if they kept insisting, they asked to see the station chief and identified themselves as law students, saying that the prisoner was a fellow student.

They were ushered into an entirely bare room, where four benches ran along smoke-darkened, plastered walls. At the back a wicket gate opened, and there appeared the robust figure of Dussardier, who, with his hair all a mess, his two little eyes and his square, upturned nose, vaguely resembled a faithful dog.

"Don't you recognize us?" asked Hussonet. That was the name of the young man with the moustache.

"But . . ." stammered Dussardier.

"Don't stand there like an imbecile," the other said. "They know that you're a law student, just like us."

Despite their overt winks, Dussardier still didn't get it. He stopped to collect himself for a moment, and then he suddenly said: "Did you find my box?"

Frédéric rolled his eyes, discouraged. Hussonet replied, "Oh, the box where you keep all your class notes? Oh yes, yes! Don't worry!"

They continued with their pantomime until Dussardier finally understood that they had come to help him; and he said no more, fearing

he might compromise them. Moreover, he felt a certain shame at having been raised in social status to law student, with the likes of these two with their soft white hands.

"Do you want to get word to anyone?" asked Frédéric.

"No, thank you—nobody."

"But your family?"

He lowered his head without replying; the poor boy was a bastard. The two friends sat there, surprised at his silence.

"Do you have anything to smoke?" asked Frédéric.

The prisoner patted his pockets, then drew out the shattered remains of a pipe—a fine pipe, a meerschaum, with a stem of black wood, a silver lid, and an amber mouthpiece.

He had spent three years working on this masterpiece and took care to keep the bowl tightly wrapped in a sheath of chamois, to smoke it as slowly as possible, never setting it down on marble, and hanging it up every evening on his bedpost. Now he shook the fragments in his right hand with its bloody nails; and with his chin hanging down to his chest, his eyes wide open and fixed, he contemplated the ruins of his happiness with an expression of ineffable sadness.

"What if we gave him some cigars?" asked Hussonet in a low voice, making a gesture as if to reach for some.

Frédéric had already set down, on the counter by the wicket gate, a full pack of cigars.

"They're yours! Farewell—be brave!"

The two extended their hands to him, and Dussardier threw himself on them. He squeezed them frantically, his voice broken by sobs.

"How can this be? . . . for me—for me!"

The two companions finally broke free of his gratitude and went off to have dinner together at the Café Tabourey, by the Luxembourg.

As he cut up his steak, Hussonet informed Frédéric that he worked with fashion periodicals and did designs for *L'Art industriel.*

"At Jacques Arnoux's?" asked Frédéric.

"You know him?"

"Yes! Well, no—that is, I met him."

He casually asked Hussonnet if he saw Arnoux's wife much.

"Sometimes," the bohemian replied.

Frédéric didn't dare pursue it; this man had just assumed a tremendous role in his life. He paid the dinner bill, with no protestation on the part of the other.

They liked each other; they exchanged addresses, and Hussonnet cordially invited Frédéric to walk with him as far as the Rue de Fleurus.

They were in the midst of the garden when the employee of Arnoux, taking a deep breath, contorted his face into a hideous grimace and proceeded to crow like a rooster. At once, every rooster in the area responded with prolonged cock-a-doodle-dos.

"It's a signal," said Hussonnet.

They stopped near the Théâtre Bobino,[32] outside a house whose entrance was down an alleyway. In the dormer window of an attic, between pots of nasturtiums and sweet peas, a young woman appeared, bare-headed and in her corset, leaning over the edge of the gutter.

"Hello, my angel—hello, my sweetheart," exclaimed Hussonet, blowing kisses toward her.

He kicked open the gate and went in.

Frédéric waited all week for him. He didn't dare go to his place, not wanting to seem overanxious to have his dinner repaid; but he looked for him all over the Latin Quarter. He did run into him one night, and invited him back up to his rooms on the Quai Napoléon.

They talked at length; they confided in each other. Hussonnet was obsessed with theater, and the celebrity and money it promised. He had collaborated on some unsuccessful vaudevilles, "had masses of plans," churned out verses for songs; he sang some of them. Then, noticing a volume of Hugo and another of Lamartine, he burst into a series of sarcastic remarks on the Romantic school. Those poets had no sense, they abused the rules of verse—they weren't French, in short! He boasted of his knowledge of the language, and he pulled out some of their best lines to show how shoddy they were, taking the most aggressively severe tone in that academic kind of voice that is often assumed by trivial people when they want to be thought of as serious.

Frédéric felt his tastes were being insulted; he felt like breaking the evening off. But why not take a chance, right now, and raise the subject on which his whole happiness depended? He asked the man of letters if he would be willing to take him along to visit the Arnoux home.

That was simple enough, and they agreed to do it on the following day.

Hussonet didn't show up at their agreed-upon meeting; he went on to miss three others. One Saturday around four he turned up. But taking advantage of their cab, he stopped first at the Théâtre Français to buy a ticket; then he wanted to stop at a tailor's, and then a

dressmaker's; he wrote some notes and left them with concierges. At long last they arrived at the Boulevard Montmartre, passed through the shop, and walked up the stairs. Arnoux recognized Frédéric in the mirror on the front of his desk; and without interrupting his writing, he held out his hand to him over his shoulder.

Five or six people were standing around, filling up the narrow room, which was lit by a single window looking out onto the courtyard; a sofa in brown damask stood at the far end in an alcove, between two curtains of the same material. On the mantel, heaped with papers, stood a Venus in bronze; flanking it were two candelabra holding pink candles. To the right, next to a chest, a man sat in an armchair reading a newspaper, his hat still on his head; the wall had all but disappeared behind the prints and pictures, fine engravings, and sketches by contemporary masters, adorned with dedications professing the most sincere affection for Jacques Arnoux.

"Everything still well with you?" he asked, turning to Frédéric.

Without waiting for an answer, he whispered to Hussonnet: "What's his name again, your friend here?" Then, aloud: "Do have a cigar, over there on the chest, in the box."

L'Art industriel, with its central location, was a convenient meeting-place, a neutral zone where rivals could rub elbows. Present on that particular day were Anténor Braive, portraitist of kings; Jules Burrieu, whose drawings were just beginning to promote the war in Algeria[33]; and the caricaturist Sombaz, the sculptor Vourdat and some others, though not a one conformed to the law student's preconceived image of them. Their manners were simple, their conversation free and open. The mystic Lovarias came out with a smutty story; and the inventor of the oriental landscape, the famous Dittmer, wore a woolen vest under his waistcoat, and when it was time to go home, took the omnibus.

The first topic concerned a certain Apollonie, a former model, who Burrieu claimed to have seen on the boulevard in a daumont.[34] Hussonnet explained her metamorphosis by listing all the various men who had kept her.

"Listen to how well this fellow knows the women of Paris!" said Arnoux.

"After you, sir, that is, if there is anything left," the bohemian replied, giving Arnoux a military salute, in imitation of the grenadier offering his canteen to Napoleon.

The discussion turned to several canvases that depicted Apollonie's head. The absent colleagues were critiqued. Several said they were shocked at the price their works fetched; and everyone was lamenting how little they earned when there entered a man of middling height, his cloak buttoned by a single button, with piercing eyes and a slight air of madness.

"What a pack of bourgeois you all are!" he said. "For God's sake, what difference does it make! The old-time men who turned out masterpieces didn't worry about a stray million. Correggio, Murillo . . ."

"You can add Pellerin to that list," said Sombaz.

But taking no notice of Sombaz's cleverness, the man continued to speechify with so much vehemence that Arnoux had to interrupt him twice: "My wife needs you on Thursday. Don't forget!"

This brought Frédéric's thoughts back to Madame Arnoux. No doubt you could get to her room by going through the curtains by the sofa? Arnoux, in search of a handkerchief, had opened it; Frédéric was able to see a washstand in the back of the room. But some kind of muttering could be heard coming from the direction of the fireplace; it was the person who had been sitting in the easy chair reading his paper. He was five-nine, gray haired, with a majestic air about him, and his name was Regimbart.

"What's the news, Citizen?" asked Arnoux.

"More idiocy from the government!"

It was a story about the dismissal of some schoolmaster; Pellerin returned to his comparison between Michelangelo and Shakespeare. Dittmer left, Arnoux going after him to put two banknotes in his hand. Then Hussonnet, believing the moment was favorable, "You couldn't possibly advance me, my dear chief . . . ?"

But Arnoux had already sat down again, and began telling off a sordid-looking old man wearing blue spectacles: "Oh, you're so good at what you do, Papa Isaac! Three pictures discredited, lost! The whole world laughing at me! It's all known now. What am I supposed to do? I'd have to send them off to California! To hell with you—just shut up!"

This old gentleman's specialty was forging the signatures of old masters onto paintings. Arnoux refused to pay him; he threw him out brutally. Then, changing his manner altogether, he greeted a haughty-looking gentleman with sideburns, a white cravat, and medals on his chest.

His elbow resting on the windowsill, he talked with him in honeyed tones for a long time, at last he exclaiming: "Oh, I have no trouble finding brokers, Monsieur le Comte!"

At last the gentleman seemed to give in; Arnoux gave him twenty-five louis, and once he had left the shop: "Enough to bore you to death, these great lords!"

"They're all wretches," grumbled Regimbart.

The later it got, the busier Arnoux became; he sorted articles, opened letters, checked over his accounts; hearing someone hammering in the shop, he went down to oversee the packing, then returned to his work; and while making his metal pen fly across the papers, he kept on making jokes. He had to dine that evening with his lawyer and would be leaving the next morning for Belgium.

The others chatted about the topics of the moment: Chérubini's portrait, the Beaux-Arts hemicycle,[35] the next exhibition. Pellerin was inveighing against the Institut.[36] Gossip and serious discussions mixed and mingled. The apartment with its low ceiling had become so crowded that it was difficult to move, and the light from the pink candles gleamed through the cigar smoke like rays of sunlight through the fog.

The door near the sofa opened and a tall, thin woman came in, making swift, vigorous little gestures that caused the trinkets on her watch chain to tinkle against her black taffeta dress.

It was the woman from the other evening at the Palais-Royal. Some knew her and called her by name, shaking hands with her. Hussonnet had finally managed to extract fifty francs; the clock struck seven; everyone began to leave.

Arnoux asked Pellerin to wait and conducted the woman, Mademoiselle Vatnaz, into the next room.

Frédéric couldn't make out what they were saying; they were whispering. But then a feminine voice rose: "It's been six months since this was settled, and I'm still waiting!"

There was a long silence. Mademoiselle Vatnaz came back. Arnoux had promised her something.

"Oh, later, later! We'll see!"

"Goodbye then, you lucky man!" she said, and left.

Arnoux went quickly into the next room, pomaded his moustache, tightened his suspenders in order to adjust his trouser straps; and

then, while washing his hands: "I'll need two panels for the doorway, at two hundred and fifty each, in Boucher's style—will that be all right?"[37]

"Agreed," said the artist.

"Good! And don't forget about my wife!"

Frédéric accompanied Pellerin as far as the Faubourg Poissonnière, and asked if he could come visit him from time to time, a favor that was generously granted.

Pellerin was reading through all the works on aesthetics, trying to discover the secret of the Beautiful, and he was convinced that, once he had found it, he would be able to paint masterpieces. He surrounded himself with every aid he could think of—drawings, plaster casts, models, engravings—and still he searched, and the search continued to gnaw at him; he blamed the times, his nerves, his studio, went out into the street to find inspiration, trembled with excitement when he'd found it, and then abandoned the picture in favor of another that would surely be even more beautiful. And so, tormented by a lust for glory and wasting his days in endless discussions, putting his faith in a thousand different absurdities—systems, theories about rules, or some urgent reform in artistic matters—he had now, at fifty years of age, produced nothing more than a series of preliminary sketches. His vigorous sense of pride kept him from utter discouragement, but he was always irritable, and always inhabiting that state of exaltation which is both artificial and natural at the same time, and which you often find among actors.

Entering his place, the first things you saw were two big canvases with base colors applied in places, spots of brown, of red, of blue. A network of chalk lines spread out across them, like stitches in an oft-mended net; it was impossible to make anything of them. Pellerin explained the subjects of his two pictures, using his thumb to indicate where the absent elements would go. The one was to be *The Madness of Nebuchadnezzar* and the other *Nero's Burning of Rome.* Frédéric admired them.

And he admired the drafts of disheveled nudes, the landscapes where tree trunks writhed before a coming tempest, and above all the pen and ink sketches reminiscent of Callot, Rembrandt, or Goya, the originals of which he didn't know. But Pellerin no longer valued these works of his youth; now he was all for the grand style; he eloquently spouted dogma concerning Phidias and Wincklemann. The things

around him reinforced the truth of what he was saying: just over there was a death's head propped on a prie-dieu, some yatagans, a monk's robe; Frédéric tried this on.[38]

When he arrived early, he would find Pellerin still in his wretched trestle bed, curtained off by a tattered piece of tapestry; for Pellerin went to bed late, and frequented the theaters assiduously. His only servant was an old woman in rags; he ate at a cheap restaurant, and he had no mistress. The bits of knowledge that he had picked up here and there made his paradoxes amusing. His hatred for commoners and bourgeois spilled out into sarcastic outbursts of superb lyricism, and his passion for the great masters was so intense that it was like a religion, and made him seem almost one of them.

But why did he never say anything about Madame Arnoux? As for her husband, sometimes he called him a good sort and other times a charlatan. Frédéric waited and hoped for confidences.

One day, flipping through the pile of pictures, he found one of a bohemian woman who looked like Mademoiselle Vatnaz, and because she interested him, he wanted to learn about her.

She had been, Pellerin thought, a teacher somewhere out in the provinces; but now she gave lessons and tried to write for the minor papers.

The way she acted around Arnoux, Frédéric hazarded, might lead one to infer she was his mistress.

"Bah! Well, he's had others!"

Then the young man, turning his head so the blush from his shameful thoughts wouldn't be seen, followed up, with a knowing tone of voice: "His wife cheats on him, no doubt?"

"Not at all! She's perfectly virtuous."

Frédéric felt remorseful, and he began to drop in at the newspaper office more regularly.

The big letters announcing the name of Arnoux on the marble plaque up above the shop seemed filled with significance, like some sacred script. The broad sidewalk inclined to ease Frédéric's walk, the door practically opened by itself, and the doorknob, so smooth to the touch, had all the charm and, as it were, the intelligence of a hand in his. Imperceptibly, he had become as much of a regular as Regimbart.

Every day, Regimbart took up his post by the fireside, picking up the copy of the *National*[39] and hanging on to it for the duration,

expressing his thoughts by sudden exclamations or simple shrugs. Now and then he would wipe his forehead with his handkerchief, rolled up like a sausage and carried tucked between two buttons on the chest of his green coat. He wore creased trousers, half-boots, and a long cravat; his hat with its turned-up brim made him easy to pick out in a crowd.

At eight every morning he descended from the heights of Montmartre to take a glass of white wine in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. His lunch, which would be followed by several billiard games, kept him occupied till three. At that point he headed toward the Passage des Panoramas to have an absinthe. After his time at Arnoux's, he would head for the Bordelais bar to have a vermouth; then, rather than go home to his wife, he would often prefer dining alone in a little café on the Place Gaillon, where he ordered "home cooking, real, natural food!" This would be followed by another round of billiards lasting till about midnight, or till about one, or until—the gas lamps extinguished, the shutters closed—the exhausted proprietor asked him to leave.

Now it was not the love of drinking that took Citizen Regimbart into these places but his old, longstanding habit of talking politics; but with age, his verve had begun to droop and his talk transformed into a morose silence. Looking at his serious face, you would have thought he was contemplating the world's problems. But nothing was said; and no one, not even his friends, knew what he did for a living, though he did let it be known that he ran a business agency.

Arnoux seemed to have infinite respect for him. One day he said to Frédéric: "There's depth to that one, let me tell you! He knows what's what!"

Another time, Regimbart spread papers concerning clay mines in Brittany across Arnoux's desk; Arnoux valued his experience.

Frédéric acted more formally around Regimbart—to the point of offering him an absinthe now and then; and even though he thought the man stupid, he would sit there with him for a whole hour simply because he was a friend of Jacques Arnoux.

After having promoted some contemporary painters in their early days, the picture merchant, ever pushing forward, had attempted to boost his profits without abandoning his artistic status. He worked for the emancipation of the arts, the sublime at a good price. All the

luxury dealers in Paris had felt his influence, which was positive when it came to small things, disastrous for larger ones. With his passion for public opinion, he led inexperienced artists off the path, corrupted the strong ones, exhausted the weak, and gave the mediocre celebrity; he could do all this through his connections and his paper. The young artists yearned to see their work displayed in his shop window, and the interior decorators found their inspiration in his designs. In Frédéric's eyes he seemed to be a millionaire, a dilettante, and a man of action, all at once. Still, a number of things he observed shocked him, because Monsieur Arnoux was quite ruthless in his business dealings.

He would, he said, have a canvas from somewhere in Germany or Italy sent to him—but it would actually be a canvas he bought in Paris for fifteen hundred francs—and now, showing everyone an invoice that put its value at four thousand, he would resell it for thirty-five hundred, as a favor. One of the common tricks he played with painters was to ask for a small version of their picture, on the pretext of having it made into an engraving; every time he would sell the small picture, and no one would ever see any engraving. When someone complained about having been exploited, he would reply with a friendly dig in the ribs. An excellent man in other ways, he was generous with his cigars, always called strangers by the familiar *tu,* would show tremendous enthusiasm over a work or a man and then, digging in obstinately, would listen to no naysaying, but instead multiply all his forms of support for the picture or man—visits, letters, advertisements. He considered himself terribly honest, and in expansive moods he would naïvely tell detailed stories about his own duplicity.

One time, wishing to make things difficult for a colleague who was about to launch a new art journal by means of a grand banquet, he asked Frédéric to sit down right there and write notes cancelling the guests' invitations, an hour or so before the event was to begin.

"There's no dishonor in doing something like this, you understand."

And the young man didn't dare refuse him.

The next day, coming in to his office with Hussonnet, Frédéric saw through the door—the one that opened onto the stairway—the hem of a dress just disappearing.

"Oh, excuse us!" said Hussonnet. "If I'd known there were women . . ."

"No, that was my wife," replied Arnoux. "She just dropped by for a little visit, as she was on her way home."

"What's that?" asked Frédéric.

"Yes, she's on her way back home, to the house."

With that, all the objects surrounding him lost all their charm. That something that he had felt vaguely present in the room now vanished, or rather had never really been there. He felt an infinite shock, and he felt aggrieved, as if betrayed.

Arnoux, rummaging around in his drawer, smiled. Was he laughing at him? The clerk set down a pile of damp papers on the table.

"Ah, the posters!" cried the merchant. "Looks like I won't be having dinner anytime soon!"

Regimbart took his cap.

"What, are you leaving us?"

"Seven o'clock!" said Regimbart.

Frédéric went out with him.

At the corner of the Rue Montmartre, he stopped and looked back, gazing up at the windows on the second floor; and inwardly he laughed at his pitiful self, remembering all the love he had put into those long contemplative gazes! Well, then, where *did* she live? And how could he meet her now? A feeling of solitude descended, surrounding and choking his desire, and yet the desire was stronger than ever!

"Want one?" said Regimbart.

"One what?"

"Absinthe!"

And giving in to his companion's obsessions, Frédéric allowed himself to be led off to the Bordelais bar. While his companion leaned on his elbows and contemplated the carafe, Frédéric sat casting his eyes to the right and left. Then, when he saw Pellerin outside on the sidewalk, he rapped vigorously on the window, and the painter had just had time to sit down when Regimbart asked him why he'd stopped coming around L'Art industriel.

"Damned if I'll go back there! He's a brute, a bourgeois, a wretch, a clown!"

The string of insults soothed Frédéric's angry frame of mind. But they were painful as well, for he feared they might just taint Madame Arnoux a little.

"What did he do to you?" asked Regimbart.

Pellerin stamped his foot and breathed heavily instead of replying.

He had been involved in a shady deal, making chalk and charcoal portraits of the great masters for amateurs who weren't very well informed; and since such work was humiliating, he preferred to keep quiet about it, generally. But "that filthy Arnoux" had exasperated him. And now it all poured out of him.

Complying with an order, the deal for which Frédéric had witnessed, he had brought along two pictures. But then that mere merchant had dared to criticize them! He had found fault with the composition, the color, and the drawing, especially the drawing—and, in short, he wouldn't take them at any price. But a bill coming due just then, Pellerin had been forced to give them to the Jew Isaac; and two weeks later Arnoux himself sold them to a Spaniard, for two thousand francs.

"Not one sou less! What a scoundrel! And he's played plenty of tricks just like it! One of these days, we'll see him landing in court."

"But surely you must be exaggerating!" Frédéric interjected timidly.

"Oh yes, sure! Fine! I exaggerate!" cried the artist, slamming his fist down hard on the table.

His violence served to restore Frédéric's calm and confidence. Sure, the man might have conducted himself more pleasantly, but if Arnoux had really thought that those two pictures . . .

"Bad, eh? Go on—say it! You know all about them, then? This sort of thing is your specialty? Oh listen, my little friend, I detest amateurs."

"Yes, well, it's none of my business!" said Frédéric.

"Then why do you defend him?" Pellerin asked coldly.

The young man stammered: "Because . . . because I'm his friend."

"Go give him a nice hug from me then! Good evening to you!"

And with that the painter, furious, took his leave—without, naturally, paying for his drink.

Defending Arnoux had convinced Frédéric. In the warmth of his eloquence, he felt a great tenderness surging up for that good, intelligent man, so calumniated by his friends, working at this very moment all alone, abandoned. He felt a great need to go see him at once. Ten minutes later, he was pushing open the door to the shop.

Arnoux and his clerk were working on some enormous posters for an upcoming exhibition of paintings.

"Well, what brings you back?"

That perfectly simple question dumbfounded Frédéric; not knowing what to say, he asked if anyone by chance could have found his notebook, a small notebook, in blue leather.

"The one where you keep the letters women send you?" asked Arnoux.

Frédéric, blushing like a virgin, denied any such suggestion.

"Your poems, then?" the merchant replied.

He paged through the specimen copies, discussing form, colors, borders; Frédéric was feeling increasingly irritated by the man's preoccupied air and even more by his hands, moving all over the posters—crude hands, flabby-looking, with flat nails. At last Arnoux straightened up, and exclaiming, "That's it!" he reached over and chucked Frédéric under the chin with familiarity. This intimacy offended Frédéric, and he recoiled; then he walked out of the shop—for the last time in his life, he thought. Madame Arnoux seemed degraded by the vulgarity of her husband.

That same week, he received a letter from Deslauriers, informing him that he would be arriving in Paris on the following Thursday. He immediately, violently, turned to this old affection, so much more solid, so much more noble. A man like that was worth all the women in the world. Now he wouldn't need Regimbart, Pellerin, Hussonnet, any of them! To make his friend more comfortable, he bought an iron bed frame and a second armchair and divided his bed linen in two; and on Thursday morning he was dressing to go out and meet Deslauriers when the doorbell rang and Arnoux walked in.

"Just a quick word! Yesterday I received a fine trout from Geneva; so we're counting on you for tonight at seven sharp. . . . Oh, it's on the Rue de Choiseul, 24 bis. Now don't forget!"

Frédéric had to sit down. His knees were trembling. He kept repeating to himself, "Finally! Finally!" And he wrote to his tailor, his hatter, and his bootmaker, sending the three messages by three different messengers. Then the key turned, the lock opened, and the concierge entered, toting a trunk on his shoulder.

Frédéric, seeing Deslauriers, began to tremble like an adulteress under the gaze of her husband.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Deslauriers. "Didn't you get my letter?"

Frédéric didn't have the strength to lie. He opened his arms and embraced his friend.

Then the law clerk told his story. His father had not wanted to show an accounting of his guardianship, claiming that such accounts were only needed every ten years. But having become steeped in legal procedure, Deslauriers had finally managed to claw back the inheritance his mother had left him, the whole of which, amounting to seven thousand francs, he was carrying with him right now, in an old portfolio.

"It's a reserve in case of trouble. I need to find out how to invest it and get myself a job, starting right away tomorrow morning. But for today I'm completely free, and completely at your disposal, my old friend!"

"Oh no, don't put yourself to any trouble," said Frédéric; "if you have something more important to do tonight . . ."

"Come on! What kind of cold fish would I be . . ." The phrase, tossed off so casually, was like a knife in Frédéric's heart, as if it had been a deliberate allusion to him.

The concierge had laid out, on the table by the fire, some cutlets, galantine, a lobster, some dessert, and two bottles of Bordeaux wine. So fine a reception touched Deslauriers.

"I swear, you're treating me like a king!"

They talked about their past, their future, grasping each other by the hand from time to time beneath the table, and gazing upon each other with affection for a moment. But then an errand boy came in to deliver a new hat. Deslauriers remarked on how its lining shone.

Then the tailor arrived with the suit freshly pressed.

"A person would think you're going to get married," said Deslauriers.

An hour later a third individual arrived, bearing a large black bag with a superb pair of patent-leather boots. While Frédéric was trying them on, the bootmaker observed with a sneer the shoes the provincial was wearing.

"Can I offer you anything, monsieur?"

"No, thank you," replied the clerk, pulling his feet with their old lace-up shoes under his chair.

The humiliation was painful to Frédéric. He kept putting off his confession. But he finally cried out, as if the thought had just occurred to him: "Oh, damn! I forgot!"

"What is it?"

"I'm dining out tonight."

"At the Dambreuses? Why didn't you say something about it in your letters?"

It wasn't at Dambreuse's, but at Arnoux's.

"You should have warned me!" said Deslauriers. "I would have come a day later."

"No, impossible," Frédéric said, brusquely. "They only invited me today, just a little while ago."

As if to make amends for his faux pas, and to distract his friend, he began untying the cords knotted around the trunk. Then, after arranging all Deslaurier's things in the chest of drawers, he insisted on giving him his own bed while he, he said, would sleep in the storage room. Then at four o'clock, he began getting ready.

"You have plenty of time!" said the other.

Finally Frédéric was fully dressed, and he left.

That's the way the rich are, thought Deslauriers. And he went off to get his dinner on the Rue Saint-Jacques, at a restaurant whose owner he knew.

At his destination, Frédéric had to pause several times on his way up the stairs, his heart was pounding so. One of his gloves was so tight that it split, and while he was tugging his shirt cuff down to cover it, Arnoux came up the stairs behind him, took him by the arm, and led him into the apartment.

The vestibule, decorated in Chinese style, had a painted lantern hanging from the ceiling and bamboo in the corners. As he passed through the drawing room, Frédéric stumbled over a tiger skin. They had not lit the candelabrum, but two lamps were burning in the boudoir at the back.

Mademoiselle Marthe came to say that her mama was getting dressed. Arnoux swept her up in his arms so he could kiss her; then, wanting to choose the wines from the cellar himself, he left Frédéric alone with the child.

She had grown a great deal since the trip to Montereau. Her brown hair descended, in long, curled ringlets, all the way down to her bare arms. Her dress was more bouffant than a ballet skirt, revealing her pink calves, and the whole of her little person smelled as sweet as a bouquet of flowers. She accepted monsieur's compliments with the air of a coquette, fixing her deep, dark eyes upon him, and then slipped away among the furniture like a cat.

He was no longer anxious. The lamps shone through their paper shades with a soft milky light that softened the color of the walls, covered in a mauve satin. Through the fire screen, looking like a huge fan, one could see the glowing coals on the hearth; beside the clock on the mantelpiece was a box with silver clasps. Here and there various personal items lay about: on the love seat a doll, on the back of a chair a scarf, and on a worktable a piece of knitting, from which dangled two ivory needles. The atmosphere was peaceful, decent, and altogether domestic.

Arnoux returned; and then, through the other door, Madame Arnoux appeared. She was in shadow, so that he was unable at first to make out anything but her face. Then he could see her dress of black velour and, in her hair, a long Algerian headdress of red silk that, twisting around her comb, draped over her left shoulder.

Arnoux introduced Frédéric.

"Oh! I remember the gentleman perfectly well," she said.

Then the other guests all arrived at once: Dittmer, Lovarias, Burrieu, the composer Rosenwald, the poet Théophile Lorris, two art critics—colleagues of Hussonnet—a paper manufacturer, and, finally, the illustrious Pierre-Paul Meinsius, the last representative of the grand school of painting, who carried his glory just as cheerfully as he did his eighty years and bulging belly.

When they all went into the dining room, Madame Arnoux took his arm. One chair remained empty, for Pellerin. Arnoux liked the man, even while he exploited him. Moreover, he greatly feared his terrible tongue—so much so that, in an attempt to soothe him, he had published his portrait in *L'Art industriel,* accompanied by hyperbolic praises; and Pellerin, more sensitive to fame and glory than to money, did in fact appear at eight o'clock, all out of breath. Frédéric assumed the two must have been reconciled for some time.

The company, the food, everything pleased him. The room, somewhat like a medieval parlor, was decorated with embossed leather on the walls; a Dutch dresser faced a rack of chibouks,[40] and variously colored Bohemian glasses stood on the table among the flowers and fruits, creating the effect of an illuminated garden.

He could choose from ten kinds of mustard. He ate gazpacho, curry, ginger, blackbirds from Corsica, Roman lasagna; he drank extraordinary wines, lip-fraoli and tokay.[41] Arnoux took genuine pride

in the dinners he gave. He paid court to all the coach drivers with a view to stocking his larder, and he developed relationships with the chefs in grand houses, who gave him recipes for sauces.

But what Frédéric enjoyed most was the conversation. His taste for travel stories was gratified by Dittmer, who spoke about the Orient; his curiosity about the world of the theater was satisfied by listening to Rosenwald talk about opera; and the grimness of bohemian life was made comical by Hussonnet's picturesque narrative about surviving one whole winter on nothing but Dutch cheese. Then an exchange between Lovarias and Burrieu on the Florentine school taught him something about masterpieces, opening up new horizons for him, and he had trouble containing his enthusiasm when Pellerin spoke up:

"You can keep your hideous reality! What does that mean, anyway—reality? Some see everything in black, others in blue, and the masses can barely see at all. Nothing is more natural than Michelangelo, and nothing more powerful! This quest for exterior truths only shows how degraded we've all become in our time; if things go on like this, art will become, who knows, some trivial matter, without the poetry of religion or the interest of politics. You'll never see art attain its goal—yes, I said its goal!—which is to put us in a state of impersonal exaltation, with all these little works, and despite all your subtleties in execution. Look at Bassolier's paintings, for example: they're quite pretty, attractive, neat and tidy, light as can be! They're things you can put in your pocket and take with you on a journey! Notaries will spend twenty thousand francs on them; the idea in them isn't worth three sous; but without idea, no grandeur! No grandeur, no beauty! Olympus is a mountain! The finest monument will always remain the pyramids. We ought to value exuberance over taste, a desert over a sidewalk, and a savage over a barber!"

As Frédéric listened to these things, he watched Madame Arnoux. The phrases fed into his spirit like metal into a furnace, fusing together with his passion, shaping and creating his love. He was sitting three places down from her, on the same side of the table. From time to time she would bend forward and turn her head, saying something to her little girl, and because she was always smiling, a little dimple would appear in her cheek, which somehow made her look even kinder and more delicate.

When the liqueurs were served, she disappeared. The conversation became very free; Monsieur Arnoux shone, and Frédéric was a little shocked by these men's cynicism. But their constant preoccupation with the topic of women established a certain equality between him and them, which raised him in his own esteem.

When they had returned to the drawing room, he picked up, so as to seem nonchalant, one of the albums lying on the table. The great artists of the era had made drawings in it, or had inscribed some prose or some verse, or had simply written their signatures; he saw that many unknown names appeared right next to the famous ones, and the curious or original thoughts were all but drowned out by a flood of idiocies. All of them containing some homage to Madame Arnoux, Frédéric would have been terrified to have to add a line of his own.

She went into her bedroom to find the little box with the silver clasps that he had noticed earlier on the mantel. It was a gift from her husband, a piece from the Renaissance. Arnoux's friends complimented him on it, and his wife thanked him; he was moved by a burst of affection, and he gave her a kiss, right in front of everybody.

After that, they broke into groups and all were talking about different things; Monsieur Meinsius was with Madame Arnoux, in a wing chair by the fire; she was bending close to his ear, their heads touching—and now Frédéric would have accepted being struck deaf, crippled, and ugly if he could have a famous name and white hair, or anything that would have established him in a similar intimacy. He felt as if he were being tortured, and he cursed his own youth.

But then she came over to the corner of the drawing room where he sat and asked him if he knew all the guests, if he liked painting, how long he'd been studying in Paris. Every word that dropped from her lips seemed to Frédéric to be original, new, her own exclusive possession. He gazed intently at the thin strands of hair that had escaped from her coiffure, caressing the tip of her naked shoulder; and he did not remove his gaze, letting his soul sink deeply into the whiteness of that feminine flesh; yet he did not dare to raise his eyes and look at her face to face.

Rosenwald interrupted them, entreating Madame Arnoux to sing something for them. He played a prelude, she waited; then her lips opened, and a pure, prolonged, sound rose up into the air.

Frédéric didn't understand any of the Italian words.

It began with a somber rhythm, something like a chant heard in a church, and then grew more animated, reaching a crescendo, the radiant notes spilling out in myriads, and then suddenly softened; and the melody turned amorous, wavering, indolent.

She stood straight, next to the keyboard, hands at her sides, her expression rapt and intent. Sometimes, in order to read the music, she blinked and leaned forward a little. Her contralto voice became mournful on the lower notes, which was chilling, and at those times her beautiful head, with those prominent eyebrows, leaned down sideways toward her shoulder; her breast swelled, her arms swept outward, her throat trilled out notes in rapid succession, stretching backward as if inviting kisses from the air; she sang three sharp, high notes, descended again, then sang one even higher and then, after a silence, concluded with a final climactic sequence.

Rosenwald did not leave the piano. He continued playing, now for himself. Here and there the guests were beginning to leave. At eleven, as the others were leaving, Arnoux went out with Pellerin, saying he would walk his friend home. He was one of that race of men who feel ill if they are not allowed to "take their walk after dinner."

Madame Arnoux had gone into the vestibule; Dittmer and Hussonnet were saying goodbye, while she held them by the hand. She gave her hand the same way to Frédéric, and he felt as if every atom of his skin were being penetrated.

He left his friends; he felt the need to be alone. His heart was overflowing. Why that offered hand? Was it just an unthinking gesture, or could it have been an encouragement? "Oh come now! I'm going mad." But anyway, did it really matter, since he was now able to go there whenever he felt like it, to live in her atmosphere.

The streets were deserted. Now and then a heavy cart rumbled by, and the pavement would shake. One house followed upon another, all with gray facades, all with windows closed; and he thought with disdain of all those human beings asleep behind those walls, all of them existing without the thought of seeing her, and as a result not even imagining that she existed! He lost all awareness of his surroundings, of space, of anything; he made his heels resound on the street as he kept walking, and he tapped with his cane on the shops' shutters as he passed, completely lost, moving along at random, being drawn along

somehow. Enveloped by damp air, he realized he was walking along the Seine.

The street lamps glowed in two straight lines, into the indefinite distance, and the reflections of their long, red flames flickered in the depths of the water. The river was the color of slate, darker than the sky, which looked as if it were being held in place by the two great, dark masses that rose up on either bank, undistinguishable buildings that only deepened the darkness. A luminous mist floated up above, over the rooftops, and all the sounds of the city were concentrated into a single humming. A light breeze began to blow.

He had stopped in the middle of the Pont-Neuf, and bare headed, his coat open, he breathed in the air. And he felt rising up within him something infinite, a great surge of tenderness that left him feeling weak, like the wavering of the river below him. A church-tower clock sounded the hour, tolling slowly, like a voice calling to him.

Then he was seized by one of those tremors of the soul where you feel that you've suddenly been lifted up into a higher world. He had been granted some mysterious new ability—for what, he didn't know—and he asked himself seriously whether he would be a great painter or a great poet. And he decided on painting, because the demands of that profession would bring him closer to Madame Arnoux. This was it: he had found his vocation! The goal and purpose of his life were clear now, and the future was certain.

When he closed his door, he heard someone snoring in the small dark room next to his bedroom. It was his friend. He hadn't even given him a thought.

He caught sight of his face in the mirror. He thought he looked very fine—and he stood there a moment, gazing at himself.

V

By noon the next day he had purchased a box of paints, some brushes, and an easel. Pellerin agreed to give him lessons, and Frédéric brought him up to his rooms to make sure he wasn't lacking any of the tools he would need for painting.

Deslauriers had already come back in. There was a second person sitting in the other chair, and the law clerk pointed to him, saying: "Here he is! It's him! Sénécal!"

Frédéric didn't much like the man. He had a high forehead, made higher by swept-back hair, and there was something hard and cold in those gray eyes of his. And his long black coat, everything he wore, made him look like a pedant or preacher.

They were talking about topics of the moment, such as Rossini's *Stabat Mater*[42]; when someone asked Sénécal what he thought of it, he replied that he never went to the theater. Pellerin opened up the box of paints.

"Is all that for you?" asked the law clerk.

"Of course!"

"Imagine! What an idea!"

And he leaned his elbows forward on the table, as the mathematics tutor leafed through a book by Louis Blanc.[43] He had brought it with him, and now was reading passages aloud in a low voice, while Pellerin and Frédéric were both looking over the palette, the knife, the bladders;[44] then they began talking about the Arnoux dinner party.

"The art dealer?" asked Sénécal. "There's a fine specimen for you!"

"Why do you say that?" asked Pellerin.

Sénécal replied, "The man makes his money from political corruption!"

And he began talking about a famous lithograph that depicted the whole royal family, each one engaged in some edifying pursuit: Louis-Philippe was holding a Code,[45] the queen a prayer book; the princesses were shown embroidering, while the Duc de Nemours was putting on his sword; Monsieur de Joinville was showing a map to his younger brothers; in the background a double bed could be seen. This image, entitled *A Good Family,* delighted the bourgeois and nauseated the republicans. Pellerin, sounding as vexed as if he were the one who had painted it, replied that everyone was entitled to their opinions; to this Sénécal objected. Art should have one purpose: to improve the morality of the masses! Only virtuous subjects should be depicted; anything else is harmful.

"No, all that matters is the execution!" cried Pellerin. "I might paint masterpieces!"

"So much the worse for you! Nobody has the right . . ."

"What?"

"No, monsieur! You do not have the right to try to interest me in subjects I dislike! Do we really need all these over-elaborate trivialities

from which nobody can get any benefit—all those Venuses, for example, or your landscapes? No, show us poverty instead! Make your viewer enthusiastic for sacrifices! And good God, there's no shortage of possible subjects—the farm, the workshop . . ."

Pellerin was stammering with indignation, but then he believed he'd hit upon an argument: "Tell me—do you approve of Molière?"

"Of course!" said Sénécal. "I admire him as a precursor to the French Revolution."

"Oh, the Revolution . . . what art . . . There's never been a more pitiful era!"

"Never a grander one, monsieur!"

Pellerin crossed his arms and then, looking right in Sénécal's face: "You strike me as a real National Guardsman!"

His antagonist, accustomed to such arguments, replied, "I am not one of them! And I detest them just as much as you do. But with principles like yours, you only corrupt the masses! Which serves the government's purposes, and they would never survive if it weren't for a load of crooks like the man we're discussing!"

The painter defended the art dealer, because Sénécal's opinions exasperated him. He went so far as to affirm that Jacques Arnoux had a real heart of gold, was devoted to his friends, and adored his wife.

"Oh, certainly! If you offered him enough cash, he wouldn't object to her becoming your model."

At this Frédéric went pale.

"He must have done you some real harm then, monsieur."

"Me? Not at all. I only ever saw him once in a café with a friend. That's all."

Sénécal was speaking the truth. But the constant advertisements for *L'Art industriel* always irritated him. For him, Arnoux represented a world that posed a grave threat to the future of democracy. Austere republican that he was, he scented some sort of corruption in every elegance, while he himself felt no need of anything, and was a man of inflexible probity.

The conversation had come to an awkward halt. The painter suddenly remembered that he had an engagement, the tutor remembered his students; and when they had gone, Deslauriers started asking questions about Arnoux.

"You'll introduce me sometime, won't you, old friend?"

"Of course," said Frédéric.

They then turned to making plans for their living together. It had been easy for Deslauriers to land a job as second clerk to a lawyer, and he went on to enroll in the law school and buy the indispensable books—and so it began, the life together they had so long dreamed of.

It was a delight, thanks to the beauty of their youth. Deslauriers had said nothing about financial arrangements, and Frédéric said nothing on the subject. He took care of all the expenses, ensured they had food in the place, saw to the housekeeping; but if someone had to talk a little tough with the concierge, the law clerk saw to that, assuming the role he'd played at school of the protector, the older one.

Going their separate ways every day, they reconvened in the evening. Each took his place by the fireside and got to work. Interruptions came quickly enough. They confided in each other constantly, burst into hilarity with no apparent cause, got into arguments sometimes over a smoking lamp or a mislaid book, angry one minute and laughing the anger away the next.

The door between their bedrooms remaining open, they kept their conversation going from their separate beds.

In the morning, they would go, in their shirtsleeves, out on their terrace; the sun rose, the river exhaled a light mist, shouting could be heard from the nearby flower market—and the smoke from their pipes formed rings, quivering in the pure air that helped awaken their eyes, still puffy from sleep; as they breathed it in, they felt the world was filled with vast hope.

On Sundays when it wasn't raining, they would go out together, walking through the streets arm in arm. Almost always they would have the same thought at the same time, and they'd be so caught up in their conversation that they were unaware of anything around them. Deslauriers' goal was money, as a means of power over people. He would have liked to make a big splash in society, make a great deal of noise, have three secretaries working for him, and give a splendid political dinner once a week. Frédéric was busy furnishing his palace in the Moorish style, so he could pass his time stretched out on cashmere-covered divans, hearing the murmur of a nearby fountain, attended by Negro pages—and all these things had become so specific, so precisely detailed, that they saddened him as if he had actually had them once and somehow lost them.

"What's the point of talking about all that," he would say, "since we'll never have it!"

"Who knows?" Deslauriers replied.

Despite his democratic opinions, he urged Frédéric to get himself into the Dambreuse circle. His friend objected that he had already tried.

"Never mind! Go back again! They'll invite you."

They received, around mid-March, among a set of steep-enough bills, those of the restaurateur who brought them their dinner. Frédéric, not having nearly enough money, borrowed a hundred écus from Deslauriers[46]; two weeks later he asked for the same amount again, and the law clerk reprimanded him for the money he spent at Arnoux's.

And in fact he had not been exactly moderate in that regard. A view of Venice, one of Naples, and another of Constantinople hung in the center of the three walls, along with equestrian pictures by Alfred de Dreux here and there, a Pradier group portrait on the mantle, issues of *L'Art industriel* on the piano, and the cartons stacked in the corners on the floor so cluttered the apartment that it was hard to find a spot to put a book down or even to move one's elbows. Frédéric claimed he needed all that for his painting.

He painted at Pellerin's. But Pellerin was often absent—it being his custom to show up at every burial and event that might be written up in the papers—and Frédéric spent hours all alone in the studio. The calm in that big room, where the only thing heard was the scurrying of mice, where the light streamed in from the skylight, and where the old stove purred away, all combined to plunge him at once into a sense of intellectual well-being. And then his eyes would abandon his painting and range over the flaking plaster wall, among the knickknacks on the shelves, along the torsos, on which dust had gathered so they looked like rags of velvet; and like a traveler lost in the middle of a wood, where all the pathways only lead back to the same place, his every thought found some connection to the memory of Madame Arnoux.

He decided on the days he would go visit her; but, once arrived, he hesitated to ring the bell. Feet would be heard approaching and the door would be opened; then, hearing the words "Madame has gone out" was like a deliverance, like one weight the less on his heart.

But he would sometimes meet her. The first time there were three other women with her; on another day, Mademoiselle Marthe's writing tutor was there. And the men who Madame Arnoux received for dinner parties never visited her; out of discretion he stopped going.

But he never failed to be present at L'Art industriel every Wednesday, like clockwork, so as to be invited for a Thursday dinner; and he would stay on longer than the others, outlasting even Regimbart, right up to the last minute, pretending to be studying some engraving or reading some paper. Eventually Arnoux would say: "Are you free tomorrow evening?" And he accepted the invitation before Arnoux finished making it. Arnoux seemed to be developing a liking for him, teaching him how to evaluate wines, warm a punch, make a stew of woodcocks. Frédéric followed his advice with care—loving anything that connected in some way with Madame Arnoux, her furniture, her domestics, her house, her street.

He spoke very little at those dinners; he sat and contemplated her. She had a little beauty spot on her right temple; the hair framing her face seemed darker than the rest, and always a little damp at the edges; she would stroke it now and then, using just two fingers. He knew the shape of each of her fingernails, and he loved hearing the rustle her silk dress made when brushing against the doorway. He secretly smelled the scent of her handkerchief; her comb, her gloves, her rings were, in his eyes, utterly singular things, as important as works of art, almost with lives of their own, as if they were people. He took all this to heart, and it bolstered his passion.

He didn't have the strength to conceal it from Deslauriers. When he returned from Madame Arnoux, he would wake him up, as if accidentally, in order to talk about her.

Deslauriers, sleeping in the little side room next to the cistern, would let out a great yawn. Frédéric would sit on the foot of his bed and begin by talking about the dinner, then recount a thousand insignificant details, finding in them signs of either disdain or affection. Once, for example, she had rejected the offer of his arm and took that of Dittmer, leaving Frédéric disconsolate.

"Oh, that's silly!"

Or, when she had called him "friend":

"Well, go to it then!"

"But I don't dare," said Frédéric.

"All right, then: just forget about it! Good night." And Deslauriers would turn toward the wall and go to sleep. He couldn't begin to understand this love, thinking it must be a last gasp of adolescence; and seeing that his friendship wasn't enough for Frédéric, he came up with the idea of inviting their friends over once a week.

They came on a Saturday about nine o'clock. The three Algerian curtains had been carefully drawn; a lamp and four candles were burning; in the middle of the table, the tobacco jar, full of pipes, was surrounded by bottles of beer, a teapot, a flask of rum, and some petits fours. They discussed the immortality of the soul and then compared their different professors.

Hussonnet one evening brought along a tall young man wearing a coat with too-short sleeves and an embarrassed look on his face. It was the boy they'd claimed as one of their own at the police station the year before.

Unable to produce the carton of laces for his master, having lost it in the melee, the latter accused him of theft and threatened to take him to court; these days, he was a clerk in a hauling company. Hussonnet had run into him just that morning on the street; and he brought him along because Dussardier wanted to see and thank "the other man."

He handed the cigar case, still full, to Frédéric, having guarded it religiously in the hopes of being able to return it. The others all invited him to come again—and he became one of the regulars.

They all had a great deal in common. To begin with, their shared hatred of the government had become a dogma not to be questioned. Martinon was the only one who tried to defend Louis-Philippe. The rest of them attacked him on all the usual grounds the papers were always printing: turning Paris into a Bastille, the September laws, Pritchard, Lord Guizot[47]—and they attacked him so well that Martinon quit talking about it, for fear of offending someone. In seven years of school he had never earned a demerit, and at the law school he was expert at pleasing his professors. He usually wore a large frock coat the color of putty and rubber overshoes; but one evening he turned up dressed like a bridegroom: a velvet waistcoat, a white cravat, and a golden watchchain.

Their astonishment doubled when they learned he had just come from Monsieur Dambreuse's. The banker Dambreuse had recently

purchased a large parcel of woodland from Martinon's father; the latter had introduced him to his son, and Dambreuse invited the two of them to dinner.

"Were there lots of truffles?" asked Deslauriers. "And did you catch his wife in your arms in the doorway, *sicut decet*?"[48]

The conversation then turned to women. Pellerin refused to admit that there was such a thing as beautiful women (he preferred tigers); and anyway, the female of the species was an inferior creature in the aesthetic hierarchy: "What seduces you in women are precisely the things that degrade them as an idea: the breasts, the hair . . ."

"But still," Frédéric objected, "long black hair, big, dark eyes . . ."

"Oh, we all know the type!" cried Hussonnet. "But enough with the Andalusians. And as for the women from antiquity, no thanks! Because after all, and I'm not joking, a whore is more fun than the Venus de Milo! Let's be Frenchmen, for heaven's sake! And Regency Frenchmen, if possible! Flow, you fine wines! And smile, you women![49] What you need to do is move on from brunettes to blondes—don't you agree, my venerable Dussardier?"

Dussardier didn't reply. Everyone started asking him to declare his preferences.

"Well, all right!" he said, blushing. "As for me, I'd like to love one woman, the same woman, for my whole life."

He said this in such a way that the others were reduced to silence for a moment, some of them surprised at his naïveté and others, perhaps, recognizing their own deepest wish in it.

Sénécal set his mug of beer on the mantel and declared dogmatically that, prostitution being a tyranny and marriage an immorality, the best thing was to abstain altogether. For Deslauriers, women were simply an amusing distraction, nothing more. Monsieur de Cisy was terrified of being anywhere near them.

Brought up under the watchful eye of a pious grandmother, Monsieur de Cisy found the company of these young men as seductive as a whorehouse and as educational as the Sorbonne. They gave him plenty of lessons; and he showed himself so zealous that he kept trying to smoke, despite the waves of nausea he felt every time without fail. Frédéric lavished care on him, admiring the nuance of his cravats, the fur on his coat and, above all, those boots of his: the leather was as thin as gloves, and they seemed almost outrageous in their

cleanliness and their delicacy; his carriage stood outside and waited for him in the street.

One snowy night, just after he had left, Sénécal said he felt sorry for Monsieur de Cisy's driver. He went on to fulminate against yellow gloves and the Jockey Club.[50] He thought more highly of working men than these gentlemen.

"As for me, at least I work! And I'm poor!"

"That's obvious enough," said Frédéric, impatient with him.

The tutor bore him a lasting grudge over that remark.

Yet when Frédéric heard Regimbart say that he was slightly acquainted with Sénécal, he warmly invited him to their Saturday gatherings, wishing to do a good turn to anyone closely associated with Arnoux. The two patriots enjoyed each other's company.

But they differed nonetheless.

Sénécal—who had a pointed skull[51]—was only interested in systems and theories. Regimbart, on the contrary, wanted facts and nothing but facts. What especially bothered him was the Rhine border.[52] He claimed to be an expert on artillery, and he got his clothes from the École Polytechnique's tailor.

On his first visit, when he was offered cake, he shrugged his shoulders with disdain, declaring that it was woman's food; and in succeeding visits he scarcely proved any more gracious. Whenever the conversation approached a certain level, he would murmur, "Oh please—no Utopias! No fantasies!" And when it came to art—though he did frequent some artists' studios, where he sometimes obliged by giving a fencing lesson—his opinions were something short of transcendent. He preferred the style of Monsieur Marrast to that of Voltaire, and Mademoiselle Vatnaz to Madame de Staël, because of her ode to Poland, which "had a lot of heart."[53] Regimbart bored everyone half to death, but he especially annoyed Deslauriers, because the Citizen was one of the Arnoux regulars. Now, the law clerk was hoping to visit there, thinking he could make some profitable connections. "When are you going to take me?" he would ask. Arnoux was weighed down with too much work right now, or he was absent, off on some trip; anyway, it wouldn't be worth the trouble, for the dinners at his place were coming to an end.

If he had been asked to risk his life for his friend, Frédéric would have done it. But anxious to make the best possible impression, and keeping careful watch on his language, his manners, and his outfits,

to the point of always arriving at L'Art industriel impeccably gloved, he was afraid that Deslauriers, with his old black suit, his lawyer-like demeanor, and his overconfident speech would displease Madame Arnoux, and that could in turn compromise him in her eyes. The others would have been acceptable, but this particular man would have embarrassed him a thousand times worse. The clerk perceived that he didn't want to keep his promise, and Frédéric's silence seemed to aggravate the insult.

He would have liked to control him completely, to see him grow and evolve according to the ideals of their youth; and his current lazy idleness disgusted him, as if it were a kind of disobedience, or a kind of betrayal. Meanwhile Frédéric, obsessed with the idea of Madame Arnoux, spoke frequently about her husband; and Deslauriers began the intolerable habit of repeating the name a hundred times a day, at the end of every sentence, like the tic of an idiot. When someone knocked at the door, he would say, "Come in, Arnoux!" At the restaurant, he would order Brie cheese "in the Arnoux style"; and at night, pretending to be having a nightmare, he would wake his friend up by howling, "Arnoux! Arnoux!" Finally one day Frédéric had had enough, and he said, in a pitiful voice, "Please stop saying Arnoux all the time!"

"Never!" was the clerk's reply.

Him, always him, and everywhere! In fire or ice,
Always the image of Arnoux.[54]

"Oh, stop it!" cried Frédéric, raising his fist. But then he continued, more gently, "The subject is painful to me, and you know it."

"Well then, pardon me, my good man," said Deslauriers with a low bow. "Henceforth we will show more respect for little mademoiselle's nerves! Again, a thousand apologies."

And that put an end to the joke.

But then, three weeks later, he said, "Say, I finally got to see her, that Madame Arnoux!"

"Really? Where?"

"At the Palais, with the lawyer Balandard; a brunette, right, medium height?"

Frédéric nodded. He waited for Deslauriers to say more. At the least word of praise, he would have poured out his heart about her, and would have cherished his friend for it; but the other remained

mute; finally, unable to bear it any longer, he asked, with a nonchalant air, what he'd thought of her.

Deslauriers had found her "not bad, but fairly ordinary."

"Ah, that's how you see her!" said Frédéric.

August came, the time for his second exam. Most people said that two weeks would be plenty of time to prepare for it. Frédéric, with no doubts concerning his abilities, swallowed down all at once the first four books of the procedural Code, the first three of the penal Code, a diverse set of notes on criminal law, and a part of the Civil Code, with annotations by Monsieur Poncelet.[55] On the night before, Deslauriers drilled him on the material, a review that lasted till morning; and to make full use of even the last quarter of an hour, he continued drilling him on the sidewalk as they walked along.

Since many different exams were scheduled for that day, the courtyard was crowded with people, Hussonnet and Cisy among them; comrades never failed to show up to support a friend on an exam day. Frédéric put on the traditional black gown; then he and three other students went in, the crowd following behind, and entered a large room that was illuminated through curtainless windows, with benches running along the walls. In the middle, leather chairs surrounded a table covered in green cloth. The table separated the candidates from the examiners, in their red gowns with ermine-braided shoulders and gold-braided hats.

Frédéric found himself third out of the four in his group, not a good position. To the first question, concerning the difference between a covenant and a contract, Frédéric replied by mixing the two up; the professor, a decent man, said: "Don't get nervous, monsieur—compose yourself!" Then, having posed two easy questions, which received confused responses, he turned to the fourth candidate. Frédéric was demoralized by this pathetic beginning, but Deslauriers, facing him in the seats set aside for observers, made a sign indicating that all was not lost; and with the second set of questions, concerning criminal law, he performed passably. But with the third, on sealed wills, the examiner looked at him stolidly throughout his answer, heightening his anxiety; Hussonnet put his hands together as if he were about to applaud, while Deslauriers repeatedly shrugged his shoulders. Finally, the moment arrived when he would be asked about procedure. The topic was opposition by a third party. The

professor, shocked to hear theories that differed from his own, asked him in a brutal tone: "And really, monsieur, is that your answer? How do you reconcile the principle in article 1351 of the Civil Code with that extraordinary attack of yours?"

Frédéric had a raging headache, having gone without sleep the night before. A ray of sunlight slipped through the shutters and shone directly in his face. Standing up behind his chair, he shifted his weight back and forth from one foot to the other and tugged at his moustache.

"I'm waiting for your reply!" demanded the man with the golden hat. And when Frédéric's physical fidgets evidently annoyed him: "You're not going to find it in your moustache!"

His sarcasm aroused laughter in the audience. This flattered the professor, who now softened. He asked two further questions on adjournment and summary proceedings, then nodded in a sign of approval; the public display was over. Frédéric returned to the vestibule.

While the usher was helping him off with his gown, in order to pass it on to the next candidate, his friends surrounded him, leaving him dazed with all their contradictory opinions about how the exam went. A sonorous voice proclaimed from the doorway: "The third has . . . failed!"

"Done for!" said Hussonnet. "Let's go."

Next to the concierge's lodge they found Martinon, ruddy-faced, excited, with a smile in his eyes and the halo of triumph around his head. He had just passed, easily, his final exam. All that remained now was the thesis. In two weeks he'd have his license. His family knew a minister, and they foresaw a "splendid career" ahead of him.

"Well, he beat you, that's all there is to it," said Deslauriers.

There's nothing more humiliating than watching fools succeed in enterprises where you have failed. Frédéric, irritated, replied that he couldn't care less; his own ambitions were higher. And when Hussonnet looked as if he were about to leave, Frédéric took him aside to whisper, "Not a word of all this to *them*—you understand?"

It was an easy secret to keep, for Arnoux was leaving the next day on a trip to Germany.

That evening when he returned home, Deslauriers found his friend strangely altered: he did little pirouettes, whistled; the clerk was shocked at his mood. Then Frédéric declared that he would not be going home to his mother: he would work during the vacation.

Hearing about Arnoux's departure had filled him with a sudden joy. He could go there to visit, perfectly at ease, unworried about being interrupted there. This feeling of complete safety gave him new courage. At last, he would no longer be distant from, no longer be separated from Her! Something stronger than an iron chain was binding him to Paris, an inner voice telling him to stay.

There were a few obstacles. He would surmount them by writing to his mother; he would confess at once about his failure, the result of changes made in the curriculum—just chance, but still an injustice—and anyway, all the greatest lawyers (and here he rattled off a list of their names) had failed their exams. But he was determined to come back and retake them in November. Now, with no time to lose, therefore, he would not be coming to the house this year; and he asked, in addition to the trimester fees, for an additional two hundred and fifty francs for tutoring, which would be very helpful—and all that was garlanded all around with regrets, condolences, caresses, and protestations of filial love.

Madame Moreau, who had been expecting him the following day, was doubly grieved. She kept her son's misadventure a secret and wrote to him to "come home all the same." A quarrel ensued. But, nonetheless, at the end of the week he received not only the trimester payment but the additional sum for the tutoring, which was used instead to purchase a pair of pearl-gray trousers, a white felt hat, and a cane with a golden knob.

And then, once he had it all in front of him: "Maybe this whole idea is just vulgar?" he wondered.

And a profound hesitation took hold of him.

To decide whether he would go to Madame Arnoux's, he tossed a coin in the air three times. Every time the omens were good. So be it: let fate decide. He had himself driven to the Rue de Choiseul in a cab.

He walked swiftly up the staircase and tugged on the bell cord, but it didn't ring; he felt as if he might faint.

He pulled again, this time furiously, the heavy red silk cord. A sound of bells chiming could be heard, growing softer by degrees, and then nothing at all. Frédéric grew afraid.

He pressed his ear up to the door; not so much as a breath to be heard! He put his eye to the keyhole, but he could see nothing in the entry way but two reed tips on the wall, among the wallpaper flowers.

He was just turning on his heels to go when he thought better of it. This time he gave the rope a light, gentle tug. The door opened; and there stood Arnoux himself, his hair in disarray, his face reddened and an angry air about him.

"Good lord—what devil brought you here? Come in!"

Arnoux brought Frédéric in, not to the boudoir or his own room, but to the dining room, where Frédéric could see on the table a bottle of champagne and two glasses; then, in a brusque tone of voice: "Did you want something in particular from me, my friend?"

"No, no! Nothing at all!" stammered the young man, trying to come up with some kind of pretext for his visit.

At last he said that he'd come to hear how he was doing, knowing he was going to Germany, at least according to Hussonnet.

"Not at all!" replied Arnoux. "What a scatterbrain that man is, always getting everything wrong."

Trying to hide his embarrassment, Frédéric paced back and forth in the room. Bumping his foot against a chair, he caused an umbrella that had been leaned against it to fall; its ivory handle broke.

"My God!" he cried. "I'm so upset at breaking Madame Arnoux's umbrella."

At that the art dealer looked at him with a meaningful smile. Frédéric, taking advantage of the moment to speak of her, added timidly, "Would it be all right if I could see her?"

She was off in the country visiting her mother, who was ill.

Frédéric dared not ask any questions about how long she'd be gone. He merely asked where Madame Arnoux and her mother were from.

"Chartres! Does that surprise you?"

"Me? No. Why? Not in the slightest."

Now the two could find absolutely nothing to say to each other. Arnoux rolled a cigarette and was now walking around the table, puffing on it. Frédéric, standing next to the stove, contemplated the walls, the étagère, the floor: and charming images swarmed forth from his memories, practically before his eyes. And eventually he left.

A scrap of newspaper rolled into a ball was lying on the floor in the entryway. Arnoux picked it up; and getting up on his tiptoes, he stuffed it into the bell in order, as he said, to get back to his siesta. Then, after shaking Frédéric's hand, "If you don't mind, tell the concierge that I'm not at home!"

And he slammed the door on Frédéric with violence.

Frédéric descended the stairs step by step. The failure of this first attempt made any later ones seems doubtful.

Then began three months of boredom. He had no work to do, so his idleness contributed to his melancholia.

He spent hours gazing down from his balcony at the river, which flowed between the grayish quays, blackened in places by the outflow running from the sewers; a pontoon for laundresses was moored on the bank, where children sometimes played in the mud, amusing themselves sometimes by giving a bath to a poodle. His gaze, moving away from, on the left, the stone bridge of Notre-Dame and the three suspension bridges, would invariably sweep toward the Quai aux Ormes, settling on a clump of tall trees reminiscent of the lime trees at the Montereau port. The Tour Saint-Jacques, the Hôtel de Ville, Saint-Gervais, Saint-Louis, Saint-Paul all rose up from the mass of rooftops before him—and the Spirit of Liberty atop the July Column[56] gleamed in the east like a great golden star; while in the other direction, the dome of the Tuileries silhouetted its round, solid blue mass against the sky. It must be behind that, over in that direction, that Madame Arnoux's house was located.

Frédéric would go back into his bedroom; then, stretched out on the divan, he would sink into confused contemplation: plans regarding work, plans to improve his chances, fantasies about the future. Finally, in order to get out of himself, he would get up and go out.

He would walk at random through the Latin Quarter, normally such a noisy area but now deserted and silent, all the students having gone home to their families. The silence seemed to make the great walls of the schools even longer and gloomier; his ear could pick up all sorts of peaceful sounds, like the beating of the birds' wings within their cages, the low purr of a turning lathe, the hammer of a shoemaker; and the clothes vendors, in the middle of the streets, looked questioningly up at every window, in vain. Inside the solitary cafés, the barmaids yawned among their full decanters; newspapers lay undisturbed on the tables in the reading rooms; in the ironing rooms of the laundries, linens trembled gently in gusts of warm breezes. From time to time he would stop at a used bookstall; an omnibus, rumbling down the boulevard, would make him stop and turn around; and finding himself standing in front of the Luxembourg, he went no further.

Sometimes he would head for the boulevards in search of some distraction. Emerging from the cool dampness of dark, narrow streets, he found himself in one or another big, deserted square, almost blinded by the light, where the statues cast black, serrated shadows on the pavement. But then the carts and the shops began again, and the crowds dizzied him—especially on Sundays—when from the Bastille to the Madeleine an immense tidal wave of people flowed amid the dust and dirt down the asphalt, the sound a constant buzzing; he felt utterly nauseated by the ugliness of the faces, the imbecility of the conversations, the moronic satisfaction beaming from every sweaty face! But the consciousness of his own superiority to all these men lessened the misery of looking at them.

Every day he went to L'Art industriel. In order to find out when Madame Arnoux might be returning, he heard, in long detail, all about her mother's state of health. Arnoux's reply to his question was always the same: she was "on the mend," and his wife and the little girl would be back the following week. The longer she delayed her return, the more anxious Frédéric seemed to be—so much so that Arnoux, touched by such deep affection, took him out to dinner at a restaurant five or six times.

During their long dinners together, Frédéric saw that the art dealer was not a very clever man. Arnoux perhaps perceived his growing coolness; in any case, it was time to repay him, somewhat, for his kindnesses.

Wanting to do things up right, Frédéric sold his new clothes to a second-hand dealer, who gave him eighty francs for them; adding that sum to the hundred francs he had left, he went to Arnoux's place to take him out for dinner. Regimbart was there, and all of them went off to the Trois-Frères-Provençaux.[57]

The Citizen began by removing his coat, and confident that the others would let him make the decisions, began writing out their order. But it didn't matter that he personally visited the kitchen to confer with the chef, nor that he went down to the wine cellar (which he knew inside out), nor that he summoned the proprietor to "give him a good talking to"—he didn't like the food, the wines, or the service! With every new dish, every new bottle, from the first mouthful, the first sip, he would let his fork fall from his hand, or push the wine away from him; then, leaning forward and stretching his arms out

across the tablecloth, he cried that one could no longer dine in Paris! Finally, unable to imagine what he could possibly stand to put in his mouth, he ordered some beans in oil, "done very simply," and these, though they were only half-satisfactory, soothed him somewhat. Then he buttonholed the waiter to ask about waiters who used to work at the Provençaux. "Whatever happened to Antoine? And the one they called Eugène? And Théodore, the little one, who always worked downstairs? In those days the cuisine was truly distinguished, and we'll never see the likes of those Burgundies again."

From this the conversation turned to land values in the suburbs, a foolproof speculation of Arnoux's. Waiting for prices to rise, he was losing out on the interest because he refused to sell at any price. Regimbart said he could find someone for him; and the two gentlemen spent the rest of the time making penciled calculations, all the way through the dessert.

They went off to have a coffee in the mezzanine of a small café in the Passage du Saumon. Frédéric stayed standing, enduring endless billiard games washed down with innumerable beers—and he stayed there till midnight, without knowing why, out of cowardice, out of stupidity, out of a confused hope that something might happen that would help the progress of his love.

When would he see her again? Frédéric despaired. But then one evening, toward the end of November, Arnoux said, "You know, don't you, that my wife returned yesterday?"

The next day, at five o'clock, he came to the house.

He began with congratulations on her mother's return to good health, for he knew her illness had been quite serious.

"But it wasn't! Who told you that?"

"Arnoux!"

She let out a quiet "Ah," and then added that at first they had been concerned that it would be serious, but their fears soon dissipated.

She was sitting close to the fire, in the small upholstered armchair. He was on the sofa, his hat between his knees; and the conversation was painful, as she kept letting it lapse, and he couldn't find any opening that might allow him to hint at his feelings. But when he complained at having to study legal chicanery, she replied: "Oh yes . . . I understand . . . business!" while lowering her gaze, suddenly absorbed in her own reflections.

He was eager to know what they were, and in fact he found he couldn't think of anything else. Dusk was casting its shadows over them.

She got up, saying there was an errand she needed to do, and then came back wearing a velvet hood and a black cloak edged with squirrel fur. He mustered enough courage to offer to accompany her.

They couldn't see anything; it was cold, and heavy fog obscured the house facades, fouling the air. Frédéric breathed it in with delight, for he could feel, through the thickness of his coat, the pressure of her arm; and her hand—tucked into a chamois glove with two buttons—her little hand, the hand he would have loved to cover with kisses—rested on his sleeve. The sidewalk was wet, and they both slipped a little; he felt as if they were both cradled in a cloud, gently rocked by the wind.

The bright lights on the boulevard brought him back to reality. The opportunity was here, and the time was short. He gave himself until they reached the Rue de Richelieu to declare his love. But then, almost at once, in front of a porcelain shop, she stopped short, saying, "Here we are, and thank you! See you next Thursday, as usual?"

The dinners were starting up again; the more he saw of Madame Arnoux, the more his lovesickness grew.

Contemplating this woman weakened him, like being around a too-strong perfume. It sank deep into his character, becoming almost his general mode of feeling, a new kind of existence.

All women—the prostitutes he encountered under the gaslights, the street singers trilling their roulades, the women galloping on horseback, the housewives on foot, the grisettes at their windows—all women only reminded him of this particular one, either by comparison or by violent contrast. Walking past shop windows, he saw cashmeres, laces, jeweled earrings, and he pictured them draped around her waist, stitched on her corsage, or glittering from under her black hair. The flowers in the stalls bloomed for her to choose among them as she passed; in the windows of the shoe shops, little satin slippers with swansdown trim seemed to be awaiting her feet; all the streets led to her house, and cabs were stationed along the streets simply in order to get one to her place faster; Paris in its entirety existed only in relation to her, and the great city with all its voices, its rustlings, was like an immense orchestra around her.

When he visited the Jardin des Plantes, seeing a palm tree transported him to faraway places. The two of them traveled together, on the backs of camels, beneath the canopy atop an elephant, in the cabin of a yacht afloat among blue archipelagoes, or each on a bell-adorned mule, side by side as their beasts stumbled over broken columns lying scattered in the grass. Sometimes, in the Louvre, he would stand in front of an old painting, and imagine her in it, his love embracing her even across the vanished centuries. Wearing a high medieval headdress, she was on her knees praying next to a stained-glass window. A great lady of Castile or Flanders, she sat in a dress with a starched ruff and puffy sleeves, waist stiffly corseted. Then, in the midst of a group of senators, she was descending a great porphyry staircase, beneath an ostrich-feather canopy. Other times he saw her in yellow silk trousers, on cushions in a harem; and anything and everything that was beautiful—the twinkling of the stars, certain musical airs, the appeal of a certain phrase, a certain contour—would abruptly, involuntarily bring him back to thoughts of her.

As for trying to make her his mistress, he was quite sure that any attempt would be futile.

One evening, Dittmer, upon arriving, kissed her on the forehead; Lovaris did the same, saying, "You'll allow me, won't you? The privilege of a friend?"

Frédéric stammered, "It seems to me that we're all friends."

"But not all old friends!" she replied. This had the effect of a repulse, a repulse in advance.

What to do, anyway? Tell her he loved her? She'd almost certainly show him the door; or worse, get indignant and forbid him to come back! No, he preferred all his miseries to the horrible possibility of never being able to see her again.

He envied pianists their talents, soldiers their scars. He wished he had a dangerous disease, hoping that might attract her interest.

One thing surprised him—that he felt no jealousy regarding Arnoux. And he could never picture her as anything but fully dressed, so natural did her modesty seem to him, and it veiled her sex in mysterious shadows.

But he did dream of a happy life with her, of being able to use the familiar *tu* with her, to run his hands slowly through her hair, or to kneel down and hold her around the waist, looking up and reading all her soul within her eyes! To experience that, he would have

to overthrow fate; and incapable of action, cursing God and calling himself a coward, he went around and around within his desire, like a prisoner pacing in his cell. He would sit immobile for hours, or suddenly burst into tears; and one day, when he could no longer contain himself, Deslauriers said to him, "For God's sake! What's wrong with you?"

Frédéric blamed it on his nerves, but Deslauriers didn't believe a word of it. In the face of such suffering, he felt all his old affection reviving, and he tried to comfort his friend. A man like him, letting himself be beaten down like this—how stupid! It's one thing when you're very young, but now it's just a waste of your time.

"You've spoiled my old Frédéric! I want the old one! Waiter, one more of those! I liked it! Come on, smoke a pipe, you animal! Shake it off—you're making me miserable."

"You're right," said Frédéric; "I'm a fool."

The clerk continued: "Ah, my old troubadour, I know what's bothering you! Your little heart? Well, admit it! Bah! You lose one, you find four others. You console yourself about virtuous women by going to the other kind. Should I introduce you to some? All we have to do is go to the Alhambra." (This was a public dance hall that had recently opened on the Champs Élysées, and that would be driven into bankruptcy after only its second season by spending too lavishly too soon.[58]) "People say it's fun. Let's try it! Invite your friends if you like—I'll even let you have Regimbart."

Frédéric did not invite the Citizen, and Deslauriers did without Sénécal. They took only Hussonnet, Cisy, and Dussardier; their cab pulled up and let all five of them out in front of the Alhambra.

Two Moorish arcades ran parallel to each other. The wall of a house closed off the far end, and the fourth side, where the restaurant was, was decked out like a Gothic cloister, with stained-glass windows. A sort of Chinese roof covered the stage where the musicians sat; the ground around the stage was covered in asphalt, and off in the distance Venetian lanterns hanging on posts lighted the area where the quadrilles were held, forming a crown of multicolored fire over the dancing area. Here and there were stationed pedestals supporting stone basins, from which jets of water shot up. Through the foliage one could see plaster statues, Hebes or Cupidons, all shining from oil paint; and the numerous alleyways, all of carefully raked golden sand, made the garden seem far more vast than it really was.

Students were promenading about with their mistresses; shop clerks were strutting, twirling their canes between their fingers; schoolboys were smoking Havana cigars; aging bachelors were stroking their dyed beards; there were English, Russians, people from South America, three Middle Easterners wearing fezzes. Courtesans, shopgirls, and whores had all come there, hoping to land a protector, a lover, a bit of money, or simply for the pleasure of the dance; and their tunic dresses of aquamarine, blue, cherry red, or violet drifted and fluttered past among the laburnums and lilacs. Almost all the men wore checkered coats; and some wore white trousers, despite the cool air of the evening. The gas lamps were lit.

Hussonnet, through his contacts with the fashion magazines and the small theaters, knew quite a few women; he blew them kisses with his fingertips, and now and then he would leave his friends to go over and chat with them.

Deslauriers envied him his manner. He cynically approached a tall blonde wearing a nankeen dress. She looked him over in a distinctly unfriendly way, and then, turning on her heel, said: "No! I don't trust you, my fine young man!"

He tried again with a big brunette, who was surely unbalanced, for she jerked back at his first word, threatening that she would call the police if he kept it up. Deslauriers gave a forced laugh; then, catching sight of a petite woman sitting alone under a lamp, he asked if she would dance with him.

The musicians, perched up on the stage and bent over their instruments like apes, blew and scraped enthusiastically. The orchestra leader stood before them, mechanically beating time with his baton. People were crowded together in clusters, enjoying themselves; hat ribbons came loose and tangled with cravats, boots disappeared under petticoats; the whole crowd bounced up and down in rhythm. Deslauriers pressed the petite woman tightly against him, and inspired by the delirium of the cancan, thrashed around among the dancers like some kind of marionette. Cisy and Dussardier continued strolling around; the young aristocrat ogled the prostitutes, but despite the exhortations of the young clerk dared not speak to them, imagining that with women like that, there was always "some man with a pistol hiding in the armoire, and he leaps out and forces you to sign checks for him."

They came back to rejoin Frédéric. Deslauriers was finished with dancing; and they were all wondering how to bring the outing to an end when Hussonnet cried out: "Look! It's the Marquise d'Amaëgui!"

She was a pale woman with an upturned nose, wearing gloves that reached to her elbows, her hair arranged into long black curls that fell along either side of her face, rather like a dog's ears. Hussonnet said to her, "Why don't we arrange a little party at your place, an Oriental bash? You could pluck some of your girl friends from the garden here for these young knights of France. But what's the matter? Are you waiting for your hidalgo?"

The Andalusian[59] averted her gaze; knowing the far from luxuriant ways of her friend, she was afraid she would end up on the hook for the refreshments. When she finally said something about money, Cisy offered six gold Napoleons, all he had in his wallet; that settled it.[60]

But Frédéric was no longer there.

He thought he had heard Arnoux's voice, and when he caught sight of a woman's hat, he rushed off at once to the nearby arbor.

He found Mademoiselle Vatnaz alone with Arnoux.

"I'm sorry! Am I disturbing you?"

"Not at all!" the dealer replied.

Frédéric had heard the last words of their conversation, and the inference was that Arnoux had hurried to the Alhambra to see Mademoiselle Vatnaz on some urgent matter; clearly Arnoux was not entirely reassured, because he said in a low voice, "You're quite sure?"

"Completely! You are loved! Oh, what a man!"

And she made a little face, pushing out her lips, so rouged that they seemed almost bloodied. But she had appealing eyes, wild eyes with golden flecks in the irises, eyes full of wit, of love, and of sensuality. They lit up, like two lamps, the slightly jaundiced tint of her thin face. Arnoux seemed to be enjoying her reproaches. He bent over toward her and said, "You're sweet: give me a kiss!"

She took him by the ears and kissed him on the forehead.

At that same moment the dancing stopped; and there, where the conductor had stood, appeared a young man, handsome but a bit too plump and as white as wax, his long black hair arranged to resemble Christ's. He wore a blue velvet waistcoat with big golden palms on it, and in manner he was as proud as a peacock, as stupid as a turkey; and once he had greeted the audience, he began to sing. The song

concerned a peasant telling the story of his visit to the capital; the singer used Norman dialect, imitating a drunkard; the refrain:

Oh, I laughed and laughed and laughed,
In that nasty old Paris!

This caused an enthusiastic stomping of feet. Delmas, "the soulful songster," was not about to let them cool off. His guitar quickly handed to him, he began to howl out a romance called "The Albanian Brother."

The words reminded Frédéric of the ones sung by the man in rags on the *Ville-de-Montereau*. His gaze involuntarily lowered and fixed upon the hem of the dress spread out in front of him. After each couplet, there was a long pause—and the rustle of the wind in the trees resembled the sound of the waves.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz, one hand holding back the branch of a privet that was obstructing her view of the stage, earnestly contemplated the singer, flaring her nostrils and narrowing her eyes as if lost in some deep, serious joy.

"Very good!" said Arnoux. "I see now why you came to the Alhambra tonight! Delmas, my dear, is the attraction."

She wouldn't admit anything.

"Ah, such modesty!"

And then, pointing to Frédéric: "Is it because of him? Nothing to worry about. No boy more discreet than that one!"

The others, searching for Frédéric, came into the arbor. Hussonnet introduced them. Arnoux began distributing cigars and ordered sorbets for the whole group.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz had blushed upon seeing Dussardier. Soon she got up and held out her hand to him: "Don't you remember me, Monsieur August?"

"How do you know her?" Frédéric asked.

"We used to work for the same company," he replied.

Cisy pulled at his sleeve, and after they left, Mademoiselle Vatnaz launched right into high praise of his character. She added that he had "a heart of gold."

The talk turned to Delmas, who it was felt could have real success on the stage as a mime; and that led to a discussion that mingled together Shakespeare, Censorship, Style, the Masses, the box office at

the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, and Dumersan.[61] Arnoux had known many famous actresses; the young people leaned in to hear better. But his voice was drowned out by the racket of the orchestra; and once the polka and quadrille were over, everyone rushed to the tables, calling out for the waiters, laughing; empty bottles of beer and lemonade exploded in the foliage, and the women shrieked like hens; sometimes a pair of gentlemen started to fight; a pickpocket was arrested.

When the galop started up, the dancers rushed into the dance area.[62]

Out of breath, smiling, red-faced, they went twirling past in a whirlwind that lifted dresses and coattails; the trombones roared ever louder; the rhythms accelerated. From behind the medieval cloister came a crackling sound: firecrackers were popping; Catherine wheels began spinning; Bengal lights illuminated the whole garden, casting a green glow over everything—and when the last of the fireworks was done, the multitude heaved a great sigh.

The crowd trickled out slowly. A cloud of gunpowder smoke hovered in the air. Frédéric and Deslauriers were making their way step by step through the mob when they stopped dead at the sight of Martinon picking up his change at the cloakroom; he was escorting a woman in her fifties, quite ugly but magnificently dressed, of an unclear social rank.

"Now that boy is not as simple as we thought," said Deslauriers. "But where's Cisy?"

Dussardier pointed toward a dining room in which they could see the offspring of the aristocracy sitting before a punch bowl, in the company of a pink hat.

Hussonnet, who had been absent for a few minutes, now reappeared as well.

A girl was leaning on his arm and, in a loud voice, calling him "my little kitty-cat."

"No, please!" he protested to her. "Not in public! No! Call me viscount instead! That'll make me think of myself as a knight from Louis XIII's day, in soft leather boots—I like that! Yes, friends, I've got an old friend here. Sweet, isn't she?" With that he chucked her under the chin. "Say hello to these gentlemen! These are the sons of peers of France! I go around with them so that they'll make me an ambassador!"

"You've lost your mind," sighed Mademoiselle Vatnaz.

She asked Dussardier to escort her home.

Arnoux watched them walking away and then, turning to Frédéric: "Do you like her, la Vatnaz? But you always play that subject close to the vest, don't you? I suppose you keep your love affairs secret?"

Frédéric paled, swearing that he wasn't hiding anything.

"It's just that nobody knows if you have a mistress," Arnoux replied.

Frédéric had an urge to say some name, to choose one at random. But a tale like that might make its way to Her. He replied that in fact he did not have a mistress.

The dealer found this a deplorable state of affairs.

"Tonight would have been the perfect opportunity! Why didn't you do like the others, and leave with some woman?"

"Well, and why didn't you?" said Frédéric, annoyed at Arnoux's persistence.

"Oh, me! Different situation, my young friend. I'm going back home to mine!"

He hailed a cab and disappeared.

The two friends walked on together. A wind from the east began to blow. Neither of them said anything. Deslauriers was regretting having failed to "shine" in front of the editor of a paper, and Frédéric was sunk in his own melancholy. Finally, he said that he thought the dance hall was stupid.

"Whose fault is that? If you hadn't abandoned us to go off after your Arnoux!"

"Bah! Anything I would have tried would have been completely pointless."

But the clerk had a theory. All that one needed to get something was to want it badly enough.

"But you yourself, just a few minutes ago . . ."

"I couldn't care less about them!" exclaimed Deslauriers, stung by Frédéric's allusion. "As if I wanted to get myself entangled with women!"

And he began to rant against their affectations, their stupid ways; the fact was, he didn't like them.

"Oh, don't pose!" said Frédéric.

Deslauriers said nothing. Then, suddenly, "Would you be willing to bet twenty francs that I have the first woman we pass?"

"Yes! I'll take that bet!"

The first they passed was a frightful-looking beggar, and they were beginning to think fate was not on their side when, right in the Rue de Rivoli, they came upon a tall girl carrying a little box.

Deslauriers caught up with her under the arcade. She turned abruptly toward the Tuileries and then turned down the Place du Carrousel; she turned her head, looking to the right and to the left. She ran toward a cab, but Deslauriers caught up with her again. He walked alongside her, making expressive gestures. Soon she took his arm, and they walked along the quays together; then, level with Châtelet, for at least twenty minutes the two paced back and forth on the sidewalk, like a couple of sailors on watch. Then suddenly they crossed the Pont au Change, the Flower Market, the Quai Napoléon, Frédéric trailing behind them. Deslauriers indicated that he was becoming a problem for them, and that all he had to do was to follow his example.

"How much do you have left?"

"Two hundred-sou coins!"

"That'll do! Good evening to you!"

Frédéric felt the kind of astonishment one feels when a practical joke turns out to work. He's making a fool of me, he thought. What if I went back? But then Deslauriers might think he envied him his lover. As if he didn't have a love, and one a hundred times more rare, more noble, more strong! Feeling a surge of anger, he arrived at Madame Arnoux's door.

None of the street-facing windows belonged to her rooms. Still, he stood there, his eyes fixed on the façade—as if he believed that by concentrating, he could penetrate those walls. Right now, no doubt, she was in her bed, serene and quiet as a sleeping flower, with that beautiful hair of hers spread across the pillow, her lips half open, her head on her arm.

But the head that appeared in the window was Arnoux's. Frédéric rushed off, to escape the sight.

Deslauriers' advice came back to him now; he regarded it with horror. So he kept on walking the streets.

When a pedestrian approached him, he tried to distinguish the face. From time to time a ray of light passed between his legs, forming a great arc on the pavement; and a man would emerge from the

shadows, with basket and lantern. Metal chimney stacks sometimes rattled in the wind; distant sounds mingled with the buzzing in his head, and he thought he could hear on the breeze the faraway sounds of a quadrille. The rhythm of his walking reinforced the intoxication he felt; he found himself on the Pont de la Concorde.

Then he remembered the night in the previous winter—when, leaving her place for the first time, he had had to stop and wait, so hard was his heart beating in the grip of his hopes. These were all dead now!

Dark clouds were sailing across the face of the moon. He watched them, thinking about the vastness of space, the misery of life, and the meaninglessness of it all. Day began to dawn; his teeth were chattering; and half asleep, wet with the fog and filled with tears, he asked himself, Why not end it? It only took a single move! The weight of his forehead seemed to be dragging him downward, and he could see his dead body floating on the water; Frédéric leaned forward. The parapet was a little too wide, and it was a kind of lassitude that kept him from trying to climb over it.

Seized by fear, he got back onto the boulevards and sank down upon a bench. Some policemen came by and woke him up, thinking he'd been "making a night of it."

He forced himself to get up and walk. And then, realizing how hungry he was, and that all the restaurants were still closed, he went to Les Halles and got something to eat in a bar there. After that, figuring it would still be too early, he wandered around by the Hôtel de Ville until eight-fifteen.

Deslauriers had already got rid of his little friend; he was at the table in the middle of the room, writing. And around four, Monsieur de Cisy turned up.

Thanks to Dussardier, last night he had been introduced to a lady, and he'd even shared a cab with her and her husband to their home, where she agreed to meet with him alone. He was just coming from that meeting. And she wasn't a woman who was known for that kind of thing, either!

"Why are you telling me all this?" asked Frédéric.

The noble gentleman now began to be roundabout; he started talking about Mademoiselle Vatnaz, the Andalusian, and all sorts of other women. Finally, after endless circumlocutions, he revealed the purpose of his visit: counting on his friend's absolute discretion, he had come to ask his help in a plan which, if carried out, would result

in him considering himself a real man; and Frédéric did not refuse. He told Deslauriers the story, without telling the truth about his own personal role in it.

The clerk declared that "he was doing it right now." This deference to his own advice enhanced his good humor.

That same good humor had helped him in the seduction, on the very day they met, of Mademoiselle Clémence Daviou, seamstress who made gold braid for military uniforms, the sweetest girl you could imagine, slim as a reed, with great blue eyes always open in wonder. The clerk had taken advantage of her gullibility by telling her that he had an official decoration; he put a red ribbon in his buttonhole when the two were alone together but took it off in public, so as not to humiliate his employer, he said. In general he kept her at arms' length, letting himself be caressed and served like a pasha, and jokingly referred to her as "a daughter of the people." She brought him little bouquets of violets every time she visited. Frédéric wanted nothing to do with that kind of love affair.

But when they would go out, arm in arm, to get a private room at Pinson's or Barillot's, he would feel a strange sadness. Frédéric had no idea how much he had made Deslauriers suffer over the last year when, on Thursdays, he brushed and trimmed his nails before going off to dine at the Rue de Choiseul!

One evening when, standing on his balcony, he watched the two of them leave, he saw, far off, Hussonnet on the Pont d'Arcole. The bohemian began signaling to him to come down, and when Frédéric had come down all five flights of stairs:

"Here's the thing: next Sunday, the twenty-fourth, is Madame Arnoux's name day."

"But how can that be, when her name is Marie?"

"Angèle too, but what's the difference! There's going to be a party in their country house in Saint-Cloud. There'll be a cab at the shop at three! Right—all settled. Sorry to have bothered you, but I've got so many things to do!"

Frédéric had barely turned around when the porter delivered a letter:

> *Monsieur and Madame Dambreuse invite Monsieur F. Moreau to do them the honor of coming to dine with them next Sunday, the twenty-fourth. RSVP.*

"Too late," he thought.

But still, he showed the invitation to Deslauriers, who exclaimed, "Ah, at last! But you don't seem happy about it. Why not?"

Frédéric hesitated for a moment, and finally said that he had another invitation for the same day.

"Give me the pleasure of telling the Rue de Choiseul exactly where they can get off. Come on, don't be stupid. I'll write the reply for you, if you like."

And the clerk proceeded to write an acceptance letter for him, in the third person.

Having always viewed the world through the veil of his own feverish ambitions, Deslauriers saw it as an artificial construct, a kind of machine functioning according to mathematical laws. A dinner in Paris, meeting a connected man, being smiled upon by a pretty woman—such little things could set off chain reactions, leading to enormous results. Some of the Parisian salons were like those machines that take raw material and turn it into something a hundred times more valuable. He believed in courtesans advising diplomats, in rich marriages won through intrigue, in the genius of criminals, and the docility of Fate when a strong hand takes control. And thus he saw frequenting the Dambreuses as being just that important and useful, and he made the case so well that Frédéric couldn't think of anything in reply.

At the least, since it was Madame Arnoux's name day, he should get her a gift; he thought, naturally enough, that an umbrella would be a good idea, to make up for the one his clumsiness had damaged. Then he came across a nice one in silk the color of a pigeon's breast, with a little carved-ivory handle, which had come from China.[63] But it cost a hundred and seventy-five francs, and he didn't have so much as a sou to spend, already living on credit based on his next trimester's allowance. But he wanted it, and he was determined, so despite his repugnance at the idea, he approached Deslauriers. Deslauriers replied that he didn't have any money.

"I need it," said Frédéric; "I really need it!" And when the other simply repeated the same excuse, he lost his temper: "You could, you know . . ."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing!"

The clerk understood. He took the money out of his own reserves, and when he had counted it out, coin by coin, "I won't ask you for a receipt, since I'm freeloading on you!"

Frédéric threw his arms around him with a thousand exclamations of gratitude and affection. Deslauriers remained cold. Then, the next day, seeing the umbrella on the piano, "Ah, so that's what it was for!"

"I might have it sent to her," said Frédéric, cowardly.

But luck was on his side, for that evening he received a black-bordered letter informing him that Madame Dambreuse's uncle had died and apologizing for having to put off the pleasure of making his acquaintance.

He arrived at the paper's offices at two o'clock. Instead of waiting to accompany him in the carriage, Arnoux had left the night before, unable to resist the allure of fresh air any longer.

Every year, when spring's first leaves began to appear, for several days in a row he would take off in the morning, take long walks across the fields, drink milk at farms, flirt with the village girls, find out how the crops were doing, and bring back lettuce plants in his handkerchief. At last able to realize a dream of long standing, he had bought a house in the country.

While Frédéric was speaking with the clerk, Mademoiselle Vatnaz came in, disappointed not to find Arnoux there. He would be gone another two days, perhaps. The clerk suggested she "go out there" to see him; she couldn't go; then write a letter; she was afraid a letter would get lost. Frédéric offered to take it there himself. She wrote it up rapidly, imploring Frédéric to be sure no one saw him hand the letter over.

Forty minutes later, he got down from the coach in Saint-Cloud.

The house, about a hundred yards beyond the bridge, was situated halfway up the hill. The garden walls were behind two rows of lime trees, and a wide lawn extended all the way down to the river. The gate stood open, and Frédéric stepped through.

Arnoux, stretched out on the grass, was playing with a litter of kittens, a diversion that absorbed him no end. But the letter from Mademoiselle Vatnaz pulled him right out of his torpor.

"Damn, damn! What a headache! She's right—I have to go."

Then, having stuffed the letter into his pocket, he took pleasure in showing off his domain. He showed Frédéric everything, the stable, the outbuildings, the kitchen. On the left was the drawing room, and on

the Paris side it looked out on a veranda with a trellis of clematis. But then, up over their heads, a series of notes rang out; Madame Arnoux, believing herself alone, was amusing herself by singing. She sang scales, trills, arpeggios. There were long, drawn-out notes that seemed to hang suspended in the air; others tumbled down precipitately, like the rush of a waterfall; and her voice, passing through the shutters, cut through the great silence and mounted up into the blue sky.

She stopped abruptly, when Monsieur and Madame Oudry, their neighbors, arrived.

Then she came out on the steps, and as she descended, he caught a glimpse of her foot. She wore little open shoes, with a little gold leather trim, with three crossed straps that formed a golden network across her stockings.

The guests arrived. With the exception of a Monsieur Lefaucheux, a lawyer, they were the usual Thursday group. Each had brought a gift: Dittmer, a Syrian scarf; Rosenwald, a collection of songs; Burrieu, a watercolor; Sombaz, a caricature of himself; and Pellerin, a charcoal sketch of a sort of danse macabre, a hideous fantasy with mediocre execution. Hussonnet had saved himself the trouble and brought nothing.

Frédéric waited till last to offer his gift.

She thanked him warmly. Then he said, "But, after all, it's practically a debt I owed you. I was so irritated with myself."

"What for?" she asked. "I don't understand!"

"Dinner is served!" interrupted Arnoux, taking her by the arm; then, whispering in Frédéric's ear: "You really don't get it, do you?"

Nothing was more pleasant than the dining room, painted in sea-green. At one end a stone nymph dipped her toes in a basin shaped like a shell. Through the open windows could be seen a sweep of wide lawn, an old Scotch pine, three-fourths stripped of needles; overflowing flower beds were laid out to break up the expanse. Beyond the river, spreading out in a great circle were the Bois de Boulogne, Neuilly, Sèvres, Meudon. Attached to a railing, a little sailboat beat back and forth in the water.

The conversation first was about the view, then about the landscape in general; the discussions were just getting started when Arnoux ordered his domestic to have the *américaine* ready at half-past nine. A letter from his cashier had called him back to town.

"Shall I come back with you?" asked Madame Arnoux.

"Of course!" And then, making a handsome bow to her, he added: "You know very well, madame, that I cannot live without you!"

Everyone complimented her on having such a good husband.

"Ah, but you see, it's because I'm not the only one!" she replied sweetly, nodding toward her daughter.

Then, the conversation having turned to painting, there was talk of a Ruysdael from which Arnoux was hoping to make a considerable profit, and Pellerin asked him if it was true that the famous Saül Mathias from London had come over the month before and offered him twenty-three thousand francs for it.

"True as true can be!" And then, turning to Frédéric: "That's the gentleman I was with the other night at the Alhambra, and not of my own choosing, let me tell you, because these English are no fun."

Frédéric, suspecting that Mademoiselle Vatnaz's letter had something to do with a woman, now admired the ease and composure with which Anoux spun a plausible excuse for a getaway; yet his latest lie, completely unnecessary, left him gaping.

The dealer added, with an innocent air, "What was the name of that tall young man, your friend?"

"Deslauriers," Frédéric said, curtly.

And to make up for the wrongs he had done him, Frédéric now began to praise him as a superior intellect.

"Ah, is that so? But he didn't strike me as being as pleasant as the other one, the clerk from the hauling company."

Frédéric cursed Dussardier. Now she would think he consorted with the working classes.

Next the talk turned to the improvements underway in the capital,[64] the newly built districts, and the worthy Oudry mentioned Monsieur Dambreuse as one of the primary speculators.

Frédéric thought this was a chance to shine, so he said that he knew Dambreuse. But at that, Pellerin let fly with a denunciation of grocers worthy of Catiline[65]; selling candles or selling money—he saw no difference. Then Rosenwald and Burrieu talked porcelains; Arnoux was discussing gardening with Madame Oudry; Sombaz, a prankster of the old school type, amused himself by teasing her husband; he called him Odry, like the actor, and declared that he must have been descended from Oudry, the man who painted dogs, because you could see the bump of animality on his forehead.[66] He wanted to feel the

man's skull, but the other pushed him away out of fear for his wig; and the dessert came to an end amid bursts of laughter.

After they had all had their coffee, the men smoked cigars under the lime trees, and they all took numerous turns around the gardens, after which they went for a stroll along the river.

The group stopped in front of a fisherman who was cleaning eels in a little shop selling fish. Mademoiselle Marthe wanted to see them. He emptied his box on the grass; and the little girl got down on her knees trying to catch them, laughing with joy and shrieking in fright. They were all lost; Arnoux paid the man for them.

Then he got the idea of going for a boat ride.

On one side the horizon was beginning to grow pale, but in the other direction an orange tint was spreading across the sky, turning more nearly purple over the hills, which were now entirely black. Madame Arnoux was seated on a great rock, with that fiery sky behind her. The others were strolling here and there; Hussonet, on the bank, was skipping stones over the water.

Arnoux returned, towing a big, very old rowboat with him, into which, despite the protests of the wiser ones, he was urging everyone. The boat began to sink; they all had to get out.

Already the candles were lit in the sea-green drawing room with crystal candle holders on the walls. Old Madame Oudry was sleeping peacefully in one of the armchairs, and the others were listening to Monsieur Lefaucheux declaim on the grandeurs of the legal profession. Madame Arnoux was standing by herself beside the window, and Frédéric approached her.

They discussed what the others had been talking about. She admired people who spoke well; he thought those who wrote well deserved more renown. But there must be, she felt, a greater thrill in being able to affect the feelings of a crowd, of people immediately present, and in seeing one's own sentiments passing directly into the hearts of others. Triumphs like that didn't much tempt Frédéric, who was, he said, by no means ambitious.

"Oh, but why?" she asked. "Everyone should have at least some ambition!"

They were standing close to each other in the window recess, the night spread out before them like an immense dark veil spangled with silver. It was the first time they had spoken of anything more than

trivial, and he was learning some of her antipathies and some of her tastes: certain perfumes made her feel ill, history interested her, she believed in dreams.

He hazarded the topic of amorous adventures. She felt pity for those whose lives were upended by passion but was disgusted by hypocritical vileness; and that moral uprightness so perfectly matched the beauty of her regular facial features that the one seemed to depend upon the other.

Sometimes she smiled, letting her eyes rest on him for a moment. He felt her gaze penetrate his soul, like those great rays of sunlight pouring down into the depths of the sea. He was in love with her without reservation, with no expectation that the love would be returned; and in those moments of silent ecstasy, which were like bursts of gratitude, he wished he could rain down kisses on her forehead. But he also felt surging within himself something that seemed to come from somewhere else; it was a desire to sacrifice, a need to devote himself immediately, a need even stronger for its being impossible to satisfy.

He didn't leave with the others, and Hussonnet stayed on too. They would return to Paris in the carriage; and the *américaine* stood waiting for them at the foot of the steps, while Arnoux went into the garden to pick some roses. Then, the bouquet having been tied up with string, because the stems were of varying lengths, he searched in a pocket stuffed with papers, plucked one out at random, and folded it around the stems, using a pin to hold it all together; and he offered it to his wife with some emotion.

"Take these, my dearest, and pardon me for having forgotten!"

But she gave a little cry; the pin, clumsily inserted, had pricked her, and she went back up into her room. They waited for her for a quarter of an hour. At last she reappeared, picked up Marthe, and flung herself into the carriage.

"And your bouquet?" asked Arnoux.

"No! No! It's not worth the trouble."

Frédéric rushed off to retrieve it.

"I don't want it!"

But he soon brought it anyway, saying that he had had to put it back in the paper, for he had found the flowers on the floor. She took the bouquet and shoved it down into the leather apron beside the seat, and they set off.

Sitting next to her, Frédéric could see she was trembling horribly. Then, when they had crossed the bridge, Arnoux turned the carriage to the left.

"No! You've got it wrong! That way, to your right!"

She seemed irritated; everything seemed to bother her. Soon, after Marthe had closed her eyes, she pulled up the bouquet and threw it out the window, then gripping Frédéric's arm, made a sign to him with her other hand never to say anything about it.

Then she dabbed her lips with her handkerchief and didn't budge again.

The other two, seated on the front seat, talked printing and subscribers. Arnoux, driving without paying attention, got lost in the Bois de Boulogne. They entered into little lanes. The horse had slowed to a walk; tree branches scraped against the roof. Frédéric could see nothing of Madame Arnoux in the dark except her eyes; Marthe was stretched out across her lap, her head resting in Frédéric's.

"She's making you uncomfortable!"

He replied, "No! Oh, no!"

Slow little eddies of dust whirled up; they were crossing Auteuil. All the houses were shut up; a streetlamp here and there lit up the corner of a wall, and then they were plunged back into darkness; there was one moment when he could tell she was crying.

Was this some remorse? Some desire? What could it be? Her sorrow, about which he knew nothing, interested him as if it were his personally; now there was a new link between them, a sort of complicity; and he said to her, in the gentlest voice he could manage, "Are you feeling unwell?"

"Yes, a little," she replied.

The carriage rolled on, and the honeysuckles and the syringas that hung over garden fences filled the air with little gusts of soft fragrance. The numerous folds of her dress concealed her feet. He felt as if he were somehow in close communication with her entire being by virtue of this child stretched out across the two of them. He bent down toward the little girl and, sweeping the pretty brown hair off her face, kissed her gently on the forehead.

"How good you are!" said Madame Arnoux.

"Why?"

"Because you love children."

"Not all of them!"

He said nothing more, but he extended his arm and lay his open left hand close to her, fantasizing that she might do the same and that her hand would encounter his. Then he felt ashamed and pulled his hand back.

Soon the carriage was riding on paved streets. It speeded up, the gas lamps multiplied, they were in Paris. Hussonnet hopped down at the Garde-Meubles,[67] but Frédéric waited until they reached the Arnoux courtyard before he got down; then he took up a position on the corner of the Rue de Choiseul, from whence he could see the carriage slowly making its way up the boulevard.

Starting the very next day, he got to work with determination.

He saw himself in a courtroom on a winter evening, when the pleadings were almost over and the jury had paled, the breathless crowd making the old courtroom creak, as he reached the fourth hour of his summation, going back over all the evidence, discovering new proofs, and sensing at every word, at every gesture, the blade of the guillotine raising up behind him; then, he was in the Chambre des Députés, the orator who carries upon his lips the salvation of a whole people, drowning his adversaries beneath his waves of rhetoric, crushing them with a riposte, sometimes thunderbolts, sometimes musical intonations in his voice—now ironic, now pathetic, rapt, sublime. She would be there, somewhere among all the others, concealing tears of feeling behind her veil; afterward, they would find each other—and all the discouragements, the calumnies, the insults would be as nothing so long as she said: "Ah! That was fine!" while running her fingers lightly over his face.

Images like these glowed for him, as if they were lighthouses on the horizons of his life. His mind, excited and stimulated, became more agile, became stronger. He shut himself up in his rooms until August, and he passed his examinations.

Deslauriers, who had worked so hard to help him pass his second at the end of December and his third in February, was astonished at his new enthusiasm. And now the old hopes revived. In ten years Frédéric would simply have to have become a député; in fifteen, a cabinet minister; why not? With the inheritance that he'd soon be able to draw upon, he could, for a first step, found a newspaper; that would be the beginning; after that, they'd have to see. As for himself, he hoped to

occupy a chair one day at the law school; and he defended his doctoral thesis so well that he got compliments from the professors.

Frédéric passed his own three days after. Before leaving for vacation, he thought they should have a picnic to bring their Saturday gatherings to a close.

He was in a good mood for it. Madame Arnoux was currently with her mother, in Chartres. But he would be seeing her soon enough, and in the end he would become her lover.

Deslauriers, who had been admitted the same day to the Orsay debating society, had given a speech that was much applauded. Though he usually stayed sober, he got drunk, and during the dessert he said to Dussardier, "You're an honest one, you are! When I'm rich, I'll hire you to be my manager."

Everyone was happy: Cisy was quitting his law studies; Martinon was going to finish his probationary period in the provinces, where he would, he said, be named deputy prosecutor; Pellerin was starting on a big canvas that he would title *The Spirit of the Revolution*; Hussonnet, the next week, was going to read the outline of his play to the director of the Délassements, and he was sure he would succeed:[68] "Because everybody will tell you I know how to write a plot! As for the passions, I've been around, so I know all about them; and as for witty repartee—well, that's my specialty!"

He leaped and landed on his hands, then walked that way around the table several times, his feet up in the air.

Such foolishness did not amuse Sénécal. He had just been fired from his job for having given a beating to the son of an aristocrat. He was only getting poorer and poorer, and he went on a tirade against the social order, cursing the wealthy; then he poured his heart out to Regimbart, who was increasingly becoming disillusioned, unhappy, disgusted. The Citizen turned his attention now to budgetary questions, accusing the Camarilla of having lost millions in Algeria.[69]

Then, since he could not sleep without having taken up his station at the Alexandre café, he vanished about eleven. The others left later; and Frédéric, in saying goodbye to Hussonnet, learned that Madame Arnoux had returned the day before.

So he went to the coach office and changed his ticket home for the following day, and then, at six in the evening, he appeared at her door. The concierge told him that her return had been delayed by a week. Frédéric ate dinner alone, and then strolled along the streets.

Long, pink clouds trailed like scarves up above the rooftops; the shops' awnings were beginning to be rolled up; the water-carts were sprinkling their fine drizzle on the dust, and an unexpected coolness mingled with the varied smells emanating from the cafes, where the half-opened doors allowed the passerby to catch a glimpse, amid the silver plate and the gilding, of sheaves of flowers reflected in the tall mirrors. The crowd moved along slowly. Groups of men stood chatting on the sidewalks, and the women passing by, women with softness in their eyes, had that camellia-tinted complexion which their skin takes on during the drowsiness of summer's hottest days. Something enormous, some grand expectation, was spreading itself outward, enveloping all the buildings. Never had Paris seemed this beautiful to him. The future seemed to hold nothing but an endless series of years, each one filled with love.

He stopped in front of the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin to look at the poster—and, out of sheer idleness, to buy a ticket.

An old *féerie* play[70] was being staged, the crowd was sparse. Up in the galleries skylights broke the daylight outside into small blue squares, while the stage footlights formed a single line of yellow light. The scene was a representation of a Peking slave market, with little bells, drums, sultanas, pointed hats, and endless puns. When the curtain descended at the first intermission, he wandered alone through the foyer, admiring, parked out on the boulevard, a fine green landau coach harnessed to two white horses, driven by a coachman in knee-breeches.

He was returning to his seat when, in the balcony, he saw a lady and a gentleman entering the first stage-box. The man had a pallid face, bordered by a thin grey beard, and he wore the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor, along with that glacial expression typical of diplomats.

The lady, at least twenty years younger than he, was neither tall nor petite, neither ugly nor pretty, and she wore her blond hair in the English fashion, with corkscrew curls; her dress had a flat bodice, and she held a big black-lace fan. For people of their rank in society to be seen in a theater out of season must imply some accidental event, or perhaps they were too bored with each other to stay at home. The lady nibbled on her fan, and the gentleman yawned. Frédéric could not recall where he'd seen that face.

At the next intermission, while he was crossing a corridor he came upon the two of them; when he gave a vague, generalized bow,

Monsieur Dambreuse, for it was he, recognized him, approached, and immediately apologized for his unpardonable negligence. This was in reference to the endless visiting cards Frédéric had sent, following the advice of his friend, the law clerk. He had evidently got his timelines mixed up, thinking that Frédéric was in his second year of law school. He envied him, he said, for being about to go out to the country. He really needed a good rest, but his business affairs kept him in Paris.

Madame Dambreuse, leaning on her husband's arm, tilted her head to him slightly; and the sharp intelligence evident in her face contrasted strongly with the distracted expression Frédéric had seen her wearing just a moment ago.

"Oh, but you can always find such wonderful distractions here!" she said, following her husband's last words. "But this play is silly, don't you think, monsieur?" And the three of them remained standing there, talking about theaters and new plays.

Frédéric, accustomed to the grimaces of provincial bourgeois housewives, had never seen a woman so at her ease and with such direct simplicity, itself in fact a refinement, and a trait the naïve take as an indication of instantaneous friendship.

They were counting on him, when he got back in town; Monsieur Dambreuse asked him to pass on his greetings to old man Roque.

When he got home, Frédéric lost no time in narrating his reception to Deslauriers.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the clerk, adding, "but don't let your mama get you all entangled down there! Get back here right away!"

On the day after his arrival, Madame Moreau took her son out into the garden.

She declared she was happy to see him starting on a profession, because they were not nearly as rich as people believed; the farms didn't bring in much, and the farmers didn't pay up regularly; she had even had to sell off her carriage. Now she explained their whole financial situation to him.

When as a widow she had encountered her first difficulties, Monsieur Roque, a capable man, had offered loans to her, which he then, despite her wishes, renewed and extended. Then, abruptly, he insisted on being paid back; and she had had to agree to his conditions, selling him the Presles farm at a ridiculously low price. Ten years later she had lost her capital when the bank in Melun failed. Horrified at

the idea of a mortgage, and wanting to keep up appearances to help her son's future prospects, when old Roque appeared again she listened to him once more. But now she was free. In short, they still had an income of ten thousand francs a year, of which twenty-three hundred belonged to him: that was his entire inheritance.

"It's not possible!" cried Frédéric.

She nodded her head, indicating that it was only too possible.

But his uncle would surely leave him something?

Nothing was less certain.

And they continued walking around the garden, without speaking. At last she threw her arms around him and held him tight, and she said, her voice breaking with tears, "Oh, my poor child! I've had to give up on all my dreams!"

He sank down on the bench in the shade of the big acacia.

Her advice was for him to take up the job of clerk to Monsieur Prouharam, the lawyer, who would eventually sell him the practice; if he worked hard, he would then be able to resell it and find a good match.

Frédéric was no longer listening but staring mechanically ahead, at the hedges and, beyond them, the garden next door.

The only person there was a little red-headed girl of around twelve, all alone, who was making earrings out of berries; her gray cotton bodice left her shoulders bare, and they had become a little tanned; there were jam stains on her white skirt; and there was a kind of nervous, skinny grace, like that of a young savage, about her. The presence of someone unknown had caused her to stop abruptly, a watering can in her hand, and her blue-green eyes enveloping him in a piercing gaze.

"That's the daughter of Monsieur Roque," said Madame Moreau. "He recently married his serving woman to legitimize her."

VI

Ruined, wiped out, finished!

Frédéric had stayed sitting on the bench, as if dazed, as if in shock. He cursed his fate, he would have liked to hit someone; and, to make his despair even deeper, he felt that an insult had been heaped upon him, an outrage, a dishonor—for Frédéric had always thought that his

father's inheritance would rise someday as high as fifteen thousand a year, and he had more or less implied that to Arnoux. So now he would look like a braggart, a clown, a lying nobody who had managed to get himself into their circle in hopes of some kind of profit! And as for her, Madame Arnoux: how could he ever see her again now?

With less than three thousand a year, that, at any rate, was completely impossible! He couldn't go on forever living up on the top floor,[71] with nobody but the porter for a domestic, and show up wearing these poor black gloves, worn almost blue at the fingertips, a wretched hat, and the same coat all year round! No—never! Never! But living was simply intolerable without her. Still, plenty of people lived well without a fortune, Deslauriers for one, and that thought made him feel like a coward for putting so much emphasis on such unimportant things. Poverty might in fact dramatically sharpen his abilities. He felt exaltation at this, picturing to himself great men working away up in their attic rooms. Someone with Madame Arnoux's kind of soul would surely be moved at the spectacle of his fall, and would begin to feel for him. Well, then, this catastrophe was actually a stroke of good luck after all; like one of those earthquakes that end up revealing hidden treasures, it had opened up and revealed the secret wealth of his character. But in the whole world, there was only one single place where those treasures could be shown for what they were: Paris! The way he saw it, art, science, and love—Pellerin had called these the three faces of God—could only live and thrive in the capital.

He told his mother that evening that he would be returning. Madame Moreau was surprised and offended. This was madness, absurdity. He would do much better to follow her advice, that is, to stay here, close to her, and work in a legal office here. Frédéric shrugged his shoulders—"Come on now!"—finding the proposition insulting.

The good woman then adopted a different strategy. In a tender voice, broken by occasional little sobs, she started talking about her solitude, her increasing old age, the sacrifices she had made. And now that she was at her most miserable, he was going to abandon her. Then, implying she was approaching death: "A little patience, my God! You'll be free soon enough."

Similar lamentations, uttered twenty times a day, went on for three months; and meanwhile, the comforts of home were starting

to weaken him: he enjoyed sleeping in a softer bed, having napkins without tears in them; and so eventually, worn down, weakened, conquered at last by the terrible power of pleasantness, Frédéric allowed himself to be taken to the office of Monsieur Prouharam.

He showed neither learning nor aptitude. Until now, people had thought of him as a young man with great potential, one who would end up being the glory of the region. It was a public disappointment.

At first he said to himself: "I have to tell Madame Arnoux about all this." And for a whole week he meditated on dithyrambic letters, short notes, in a sublime, lapidary style. Fear of admitting his situation made him hesitate, and finally he decided that it would be better to write to the husband. Arnoux knew about life, and would be able to understand.

Then, after two more weeks of hesitation: "Bah! I won't be seeing them again; let them forget me. That way, at least I won't have done any harm to her memory of me. She'll think I've died, and she'll miss me . . . maybe."

Since overwrought resolutions didn't cost him anything, he swore now that he would never return to Paris, and never even try to hear anything of Madame Arnoux.

But he missed the smell of the gas lights, the rattling noise of the omnibuses. He dreamed about everything she'd ever said to him, about the quality of her voice, the light in her eyes—and now, having come to see himself as a dead man, he did nothing whatsoever.

He would get up late and gaze out the windows at the wagon teams passing by. The first six months were especially abominable.

Yet on some days he would be overcome with self-loathing. Then he would go out. He walked along the meadows, half-covered with water from the Seine during the winter. Rows of poplars formed borders, dividing one meadow from another. Here and there, he would come upon a little bridge. He would wander until evening, crushing yellow leaves beneath his feet, breathing in the mists, leaping over ditches; when the blood pulsed more rapidly in his veins, he would feel a yearning for furious action; he wanted to go off and become a trapper in America, serve a pasha in the Orient, take ship as a sailor; and he would pour out all his melancholy in long letters to Deslauriers.

The latter was working hard, trying to get ahead. His friend's cowardly behavior and eternal jeremiads seemed stupid to him, and soon

their correspondence dwindled down to almost nothing. Frédéric had given all the furniture to Deslauriers, who was staying on in the apartment. His mother brought it up from time to time; finally one day he admitted the gift, and she was scolding him about it when a letter came for him.

"What is it?" she asked. "Are you trembling?"

"No, I'm fine!" replied Frédéric.

Deslauriers told him that he had let Sénécal in, and the two of them had been living together for two weeks. So Sénécal was sprawling himself out among all the things that came from Arnoux's shop! He might sell them, make remarks about them, joke about them. Frédéric felt the blow deep in his soul. He wished he were dead.

His mother called to him. She wanted to consult with him about planting in the garden.

This garden, like an English one, was divided in two by a log fence, and one half belonged to old Roque, who had another one, for vegetables, down by the river. The two neighbors, having quarreled, avoided being in the garden at the same time. But since Frédéric's return, the old man came there more often, and made every effort to be polite to the son of Madame Moreau. He felt sorry for him having to live in a small town. One day, he told him that Monsieur Dambreuse had asked about him. Another time, he talked at length about the custom in Champagne, where noble status was passed on through the female line.

"In those days, you would have been a lord, because your mother was one of the de Fouvens. Anyway, say what you like, but a name is worth something! And after all," he added, with a sly look, "it's up to the Keeper of the Seals."[72]

Aristocratic pretensions were the last thing one would have associated with a man who looked like this. Short as he was, his oversized brown coat exaggerated the length of his torso. When he removed his cap, there appeared an almost feminine face with a very pointed nose; his yellowish hair looked like it might be a wig; he greeted everyone he met by making a low bow, always brushing up against whatever wall he was passing.

Until he was fifty, he was content with the services of Catherine, a servant from Lorraine the same age as he, heavily scarred by smallpox. But around 1834 he returned from Paris accompanied by a superb blonde with a sheeplike face and the airs of a queen. Soon she was

swanning around, showing off a pair of large earrings, and then all was explained with the birth of a daughter, registered under the name Élisabeth-Olympe-Louise Roque.

Catherine, in her jealousy, expected to hate the child, called Louise. But *au contraire*—she ended up loving her, lavishing care, attention, and caresses on her, hoping to supplant the mother and make her look odious—an easy enough thing to do, as Madame Éléonore completely neglected her child, preferring to spend her time gossiping with shopkeepers. Starting the very day after she was married, she paid a call on the subprefecture, no longer spoke familiarly with the servants, and believed that by being strict with her child, she would demonstrate her new, respectable status. She attended the child's lessons; the tutor, an old bureaucrat from the mayor's office, didn't know the first thing about teaching. The pupil rebelled, got slapped for it, and went off to weep on the lap of Catherine, who invariably took her part. Then the two women would start quarreling; Monsieur Roque made them both be quiet. He had got married out of affection for his daughter, and he didn't want to see her being tormented.

The child often wore an old, ragged white dress and lace-trimmed underwear; and on holidays she would go out dressed like a princess, in order to mortify the bourgeoisie who wouldn't let their brats play with her because of her illegitimate birth.

She spent her life alone in her garden, playing on her swing, running after butterflies, then abruptly stopping to stare at the beetles crawling on the rose bushes. It was these habits, no doubt, that gave her face an expression of both strength and dreaminess. She was just about the same size as Marthe, in any case, and so much so that Frédéric said to her, the second time they met, "Would you permit me to give you a kiss, mademoiselle?"

The little girl lifted her head up and replied, "I'd like that!"

But the log fence separated them.

"You'll have to climb up," said Frédéric.

"No—pick me up!"

He bent over the fence, and lifting her under her arms, gave her a kiss on both cheeks. He set her back down on her side, and the two followed the same procedure every time they met.

With as little reserve as a four-year-old, as soon as she heard her friend coming, she raced over to meet him, or sometimes, hiding behind a tree, she would yap like a dog to try to frighten him.

One day, when his mother was out, Frédéric brought the girl up to Madame Moreau's bedroom. She opened every bottle of scent and worked an enormous amount of pomade into her hair; then, perfectly at ease, she stretched out on the bed and lay there, eyes open.

"I'm pretending to be your wife," she said.

The next day, he found her in tears. She admitted that she was "crying for her sins," and, when he asked her what they were, she lowered her eyes and said, "Don't ask me any more!"

Her first communion was approaching; they had taken her that morning to confession.

The sacrament didn't make her any more sensible. She would sometimes fly into terrible rages; Monsieur Frédéric had to be called in to calm her down.

Often he brought her along on his long walks. While walking, he would daydream, and she would pick poppies from the edges of the fields, and when she found him sadder than usual, she would try to console him with kind words. His heart, deprived of love as it was, threw itself into this friendship with a child; he would draw her pictures of people, tell her stories, and he began reading books with her.

He started with the *Annales romantiques,* a collection of verse and prose popular at the time.[73] Then, forgetting how young she was—so much had her intelligence charmed him—he read successively *Atala, Cinq-Mars, Les Feuilles d'automne.*[74] But one night—the night she had listened to him read *Macbeth,* in the simple Letourner translation[75]—she woke up crying out, "The spot! The spot!" Her teeth were chattering, she was shivering, and her eyes fixed upon her outstretched right hand, she kept rubbing it and saying, "The spot won't go away!" Finally the doctor arrived, and he recommended she avoid overexcitement.

The bourgeois could only see in this an unfavorable portent for the girl's morals. People said that "the Moreau boy" was grooming her to become an actress.

But soon enough another event took precedence—namely, the arrival of Uncle Barthélemy. Madame Moreau gave him her own bedroom to sleep in, and in her deference to him she even went so far as to serve meat on abstinence days.

The old man was only minimally friendly. He constantly compared Le Havre with Nogent, finding the air of the latter stuffy, the bread

bad, the streets ill paved, the cuisine mediocre, and the inhabitants lazy. "Business is in sorry shape here in your town!" He criticized the extravagancies of his deceased brother, whereas he, himself, had managed to accumulate an annual income of twenty-seven thousand! Finally, at the end of the week, he took his leave, and on the step of the carriage, his final words were not remotely encouraging: "I'm always glad to see that you've got things in good shape."

"You won't get a thing!" said Madame Moreau, coming back inside.

Frédéric had only come because of her pleading; and during the week she kept making openings for him to speak on the subject, perhaps too obviously. Now she repented having tried, and she sat in her armchair, head lowered, lips tight. Frédéric, sitting across from her, watched her; and the two of them lapsed into silence, as they had five years before, upon his return from Montereau. The coincidence occurred to him now, and it led him to remember Madam Arnoux.

Just then the crack of a whip was heard outside the window, along with a voice calling him.

It was old Roque, alone in his cart. He was going to spend the day at La Fortrelle, Monsieur Dambreuse's place, and he cordially invited Frédéric to come along with him. "You won't need an invitation if you come with me—don't worry!"

Frédéric felt like accepting. But how could he explain his indefinite stay in Nogent? He didn't have any suitable clothes; and what would his mother say? He said no.

From then on, their relations became less amical. Louise was growing up; Madame Éleonore fell dangerously ill; and the relationship came to an end, much to Madame Moreau's relief, as she feared her son's career would be damaged by consorting with such people.

She hoped to buy him the post of clerk at the law court; Frédéric was not too violently opposed to the idea. Now he accompanied her to Mass, played cards with her in the evening, grew accustomed to provincial life, indeed sank into it—and even his love had become a kind of gloomy pleasure, a sleepy charm. Having poured out his sorrow in his letters, mixed it in with his reading, walked with it through the countryside, projecting it everywhere, he had by now practically exhausted it, so much so that Madame Arnoux was like a deceased person, the location of whose grave he was surprised not to know; his affection had become that quiet, that resigned.

On the twelfth of December in 1845, about nine in the morning, the cook brought a letter up to his room. The address, written in large characters, was in an unfamiliar hand; and Frédéric, still not awake, was in no hurry to open it. But finally he did:

Justice of the Peace, Le Havre, Third Arrondissement

Monsieur,
Monsieur Moreau, your uncle, having died intestate . . .

He was the heir!

As if fire had broken out behind the wall, he leaped out of bed, barefoot, in his nightshirt; he ran his hands over his face, doubting what he had just seen, fearing he was still dreaming, and trying to establish the reality of it, threw open the window as wide as it could go.

It had snowed; the rooftops were all white; he could recognize, down in the courtyard, a washtub that he'd tripped over the previous evening.

He reread the letter three times in a row. Was it true? His uncle's whole fortune! Twenty-seven thousand a year—and then a frantic joy overcame him at the idea of seeing Madame Arnoux again. With all the detail of a hallucination, he could see himself near her, at her home, bringing her some gift wrapped in silk, while out in front his tilbury—no, his coupé—awaited him. A black coupé, and a servant in brown livery; he could hear the snorting of his horses and the sound of the carriage's curb chain mingling with that of their kisses. And it would go on like that, day after day, indefinitely. He would receive them in his place, in his house; the dining room would be done in red leather, the boudoir in yellow silk, with divans in every room! And think of the etageres! The Chinese vases! The carpets! The images passed so tumultuously through his mind that he felt dizzy. Then he remembered his mother; and he went downstairs, the letter in his hand.

Madame Moreau tried to conceal her emotion, and she nearly fainted. Frédéric took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

"Oh my dear mother, you can buy back your carriage now; laugh now, no more tears, be happy!"

Ten minutes later the news was circulating as far as the outskirts of town. Soon all their friends—including Messieurs Benoist, Gamblin,

Chambion—were hurrying over. Frédéric escaped for a moment to write to Deslauriers. More visitors came, and the afternoon passed in waves of congratulations. Nobody remembered Roque's wife, who in fact was "doing very poorly."

That evening, when they were alone together, Madame Moreau advised her son to set up his law office in Troyes. Once he was better known in the region, it would be easier to find suitable matches for him.

"Oh, no—that's too much!" cried Frédéric.

He had just barely had time to grasp his good luck in his hands, and now they wanted to wrench it away from him. He declared his firm resolution to live in Paris.

"But what will you do there?"

"Nothing!"

Madame Moreau, taken aback by this new attitude, asked him what he wanted to become.

"A cabinet minister!" replied Frédéric.

And he assured her that he wasn't joking, that he wanted to get launched into the world of diplomacy, that all his studies and his instincts were leading him in that direction. He would first, with the protection of Monsieur Dambreuse, get into the Council of State.

"But do you know him?"

"Of course I do! Through Roque!"

"Strange," said Madame Moreau.

Now that he had reawakened her old dreams of ambition, she gave herself up to them, and spoke no more of other plans.

If he had let himself be governed by his impatience, Frédéric would have been off that very moment. The next day, he found that all the seats in the coach were already reserved; he would have to wait, fretting, until the day after, at seven in the evening.

They were sitting down to their dinner when they heard the chuch bells ring three times; and the maid came in to announce that Madame Éleonore had just died.

This death, after all, was really no tragedy for anyone, not even for her child! The girl would, eventually, only be better off for it.

Since the two houses adjoined, they heard a great commotion of coming and going, and a constant buzzing of voices; and the idea that there was a corpse next door added a funereal touch to their

impending separation. Madame Moreau, two or three times, wiped tears from her eyes. Frédéric's heart was heavy.

After the meal, Catherine appeared and stopped him: mademoiselle absolutely had to see him; she was waiting for him out in the garden. He went out, bounded over the fence, and occasionally bumping into trees, found his way to Monsieur Roque's house; there were lights in one window on the top floor. Then a form emerged from the shadows, and a voice whispered to him: "It's me."

She seemed taller than usual, probably because of her black dress. Not knowing what to say to begin with, he simply took her hands and sighed, "Ah, my poor Louise!"

She said nothing. But she looked at him, deep into his eyes, for a long time. Frédéric was anxious not to miss his coach; he thought he could hear its wheels in the distance, and he tried to conclude the meeting. "Catherine told me you had something . . ."

"Yes, it's true! I wanted to tell you . . ."

Her use of the formal *vous* surprised him; and then, when she had fallen silent: "What is it, then?"

"I don't know anymore. I've forgotten! Is it true that you're leaving?"

"Yes, right now."

She repeated: "Ah, right now . . . right away? . . . so we won't be seeing each other again?"

She was choked by sobs. "Goodbye! Goodbye! Oh, kiss me!"

And she threw herself into his arms.

PART II

I

When Frédéric took his seat in the back of the coupé and the coach began to move, all five horses pulling forward at the same time, he sank into a mental state that was like intoxication. Like an architect planning an edifice, he began arranging, in advance, the course of his future life. He heaped it with delicacies, with luxuries; it mounted ever upward, to the sky; a vast abundance of things spread out before him, and his visions became so all-consuming that all exterior objects disappeared entirely.

When they reached the bottom of the Sourdun hill, he suddenly recognized where they were. They had traveled only five kilometers, more or less. He felt indignant. He lowered the transom window to see the road. He asked the driver several times exactly how long it would take them to get there. But he calmed himself down and leaned back into his corner, eyes wide open.

The lantern suspended from the postilion's seat illuminated the hindquarters of the horses closest to the driver. Beyond that, he could make out nothing more than the manes of the other horses, undulating like white waves; their breath was like a fog on both sides of the team; the iron chains rattled, the windows shaking in their frames; and the heavy vehicle kept rolling steadily over the cobbled roadway. Here and there he could see the wall of a country house, or perhaps

an inn, all by itself. Sometimes, as they passed through the villages, a baker's oven would project a sudden fiery light, and the monstrous silhouettes of the horses raced across the facades of the houses opposite. At the posthouse, when the team had been unharnessed a great silence descended, lasting only a moment. Someone stamped his feet up above, under the canvas awning, while in an open doorway a woman stood, holding a candle cupped in her hands. Then the driver leaped up onto the step, and the coach was off.

At Momans they heard the clock strike one-fifteen.

So it'll be today, he thought, today at last, and so soon!

But then, little by little, his hopes and his memories—Nogent, the Rue de Choiseul, Madame Arnoux, his mother—all began to jumble together.

The loud sound of a wooden bridge woke him; they were crossing the Pont de Charenton: it was Paris. Now his two traveling companions woke, one removing his nightcap and the other his scarf, and both began to chat. The first, a fat, red-faced man wearing a velvet waistcoat, was a salesman; the other was coming to the capitol to see a doctor—and now Frédéric, afraid he might have disturbed him during the night, began spontaneously to apologize, a sign of how soft and tender happiness had made his heart.

The Quai de la Gare was flooded, so they had to turn right, and they soon found themselves in the country again, tall factory chimneys, in the distance, pouring out smoke. Then they turned into Ivry, then down a street; suddenly, he could see the dome of the Panthéon.

The torn-up plain looked vaguely like a city in ruins. The walls of the Paris fortifications bulged out along the horizon; and on the walkways that bordered their route, small trees, branchless, were protected by wooden stakes bristling with nails.[1] Chemical factories alternated with lumber yards. Tall gates, the kind common on farms, were half open to reveal foul inner courtyards heaped with trash, standing pools of dirty water in their midst. Long, low taverns, painted a reddish brown, displayed crossed billiard cues on a wreath of painted flowers, between the windows on the second floor; here and there stood a half-built stucco shack, abandoned now. Then the double lines of houses began to repeat; occasionally, as one got closer to them, a big tin cigar would stand out from one of the blank facades, indicating a tobacco shop. Midwives' signs displayed a bonneted

matron dandling a baby in a lace-trimmed cap. Posters, three-fourths shredded, blanketed the corners of walls and shivered in the wind like rags. Workingmen in smocks walked along among the various carts of brewers, laundresses, and butchers; a fine rain was falling under a pale sky, but the two eyes that were, to him, brighter than the sun itself, shone through the mist.

While at the city gate, they had to wait a long while behind a line of poultry vendors and carters, as well as a flock of sheep. The sentry, his hood thrown back, paced back and forth in front of his box, trying to keep warm. The toll collector climbed up on top of the coach, as a cornet fanfare broke out. They took off down the boulevard at a fast trot, the crosspieces rattling, the traces flying. The lash of the long whip cracked in the humid air. The driver kept up his cry: "Heads up! Heads up! Look out!"—and the street sweepers jumped aside, pedestrians too, mud spattering on the coach windows, and they passed carts, cabs, omnibuses. Finally, they came to the gates of the Jardin des Plantes.

The Seine, yellowish, was almost as high as the bridges. A cool breeze wafted from the river, and Frédéric breathed it in with all his might, savoring that fine Parisian air which seems to contain both amorous outpourings and emanations of intellectual delights; he was moved when he caught sight of the first cab. And he loved even the straw-strewn doorways of the wine shops, the shoeshine boys toting their boxes, the grocers' boys rattling their coffee roasters. Women came hurrying by under umbrellas; he bent down to try to see their faces; it was always possible that some chance might have brought Madame Arnoux out.

The shops filed past, the crowd increased, and the noise level got louder. After the Quai Saint-Bernard, the Quai de la Tournelle, and the Quai Montebello, they took the Quai Napoléon; he tried to make out the windows of his apartment, but they were too far off. Then they crossed the Seine on the Pont-Neuf and drove down to the Louvre; then, passing via the Rue Saint-Honoré, the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, and the Rue du Bouloi, they reached the Rue Coq-Héron, and the coach swung into the courtyard of his building.

Wanting to prolong his pleasure, Frédéric took as long as possible in dressing, and he even went on foot all the way to the Boulevard Montmartre; he smiled at the idea that he would be seeing it very soon

now, seeing that marble plaque, that cherished name—but then he raised his eyes. No more display windows, no more paintings, nothing!

He hurried over to the Rue Choiseul. Monsieur and Madame Arnoux no longer lived there. A neighbor was taking care of the porter's lodgings. Frédéric waited for the porter; at last the man appeared, but he was not the same one as before. He had no idea where they'd moved to.

Frédéric went into a café, and while he had his breakfast, he consulted the *Almanach du Commerce.* There were three hundred different Arnoux listings, but not one of them was a Jacques Arnoux! Where could they be staying? Pellerin must know.

He went directly to his studio at the top of the Faubourg Poissonnière. There was no doorbell, and no knocker, so he banged on the door with his fist and called for Pellerin. All he got in return was silence.

Then he thought of Hussonnet. But where would you go looking for a man like that? One time he had accompanied him to the home of his mistress on the Rue de Fleurus. Having made it to the Rue de Fleurus, Frédéric suddenly remembered that he didn't know the woman's name.

He turned to the Prefecture of Police. He roamed up one stairway and down another, from office to office. The information office was closing. They told him to come back tomorrow.

Then he went around to all the art dealers he could find, to see if any of them knew Arnoux. Monsieur Arnoux was no longer in business.

Discouraged, frustrated, sick at heart, he went back to his hotel room and lay down. But as soon as he had stretched out under the covers, an idea made him sit up with joy. "Regimbart! What an idiot I was, not to think of him!"

The next day at seven, he was on the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires in front of a bar where Regimbart made it a habit of drinking white wine. The place wasn't open yet; he took a walk around the neighborhood and after half an hour came back. Regimbart had just left. Frédéric rushed frantically into the street. He thought he saw the man's cap, off in the distance; a hearse and several coaches draped in mourning came between them. Once the obstacle had passed, the vision had disappeared.

Fortunately, he remembered that the Citizen ate at eleven on the dot every day at a little restaurant on the Place Gaillon. It was just a

matter now of being patient; and after an interminable stroll from the Bourse to the Madeleine, and the Madeleine to the Gymnase, Frédéric, at precisely eleven o'clock, entered the restaurant on the Place Gaillon, certain of finding Regimbart there.

"Never heard of him," said the owner of the greasy spoon, insolently.

Frédéric insisted; the man replied, "Still don't know him, monsieur!" He made his eyebrows arch in a regal manner, and shook his head in a mysterious way.

But in the last conversation they'd had, the Citizen had said something about a café called Alexandre. Frédéric wolfed down a brioche and then, jumping into a cab, leaned out to the driver and asked if there weren't, somewhere up on the heights of Sainte-Geneviève, a place called Alexandre. The driver took him to the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Michel, to a place bearing that name, and in response to his question—"Monsieur Regimbart, please?"—the owner of the café said, with an extremely gracious smile, "We haven't seen him yet today, monsieur," and he cast a meaningful glance at his wife, sitting behind the counter.

And then, turning to the clock: "But I believe we'll see him here in ten minutes, or quarter of an hour at most. Célestin, quick—the papers! What can I get monsieur to drink?"

Though he didn't feel like drinking, Frédéric downed a glass of rum, then a kirsch, then a curaçao, then various grogs, some hot, some cold. He read the entire edition of that day's *Siècle,* then reread it; he pored over the caricature in the *Charivari* so intently that he found himself studying the grains in the paper;[2] he got to the point where he knew every advertisement by heart. Every now and then the sound of boots could be heard outside on the sidewalk: it was him! And then someone's shape would come into view just outside the window—but the shape always walked on by!

Frédéric tried to fight his boredom by changing places; first he went and sat in the back, then on the right, then on the left; then he sat right in the middle of the banquette, his two arms stretched out on either side of him. A cat, scratching delicately at the velvet back of the bench, startled him by suddenly bounding up to lick off the last drops of syrup on a plate; and the child of the house, a detestable little brat of four, banged his rattle on the steps of the counter. His mama, a pale little woman with bad teeth, smiled a stupid smile. What on earth

could be keeping Regimbart? Frédéric continued to wait, sinking ever deeper into a bottomless pool of misery.

Outside the rain beat down, sounding like hail on the roof of his cab. When he pulled back the muslin curtain, he could see the poor horse standing in the street, as motionless as a wooden statue of a horse. The gutter had become a torrent, rushing between the spokes of the cab's wheels, and the driver, huddling under the covering, was dozing; but, fearing that his bourgeois customer might make an escape, from time to time he would half-open the door to the café, the rain streaming off him like a river. If looks could wear an object down, Frédéric would have dissolved the clock altogether with his gaze. But the clock just kept on ticking. Alexandre, the owner, was walking up and down the restaurant, repeating: "He'll be here, don't worry! He'll be here!" And to distract him, he tried to get a conversation started, talking politics. He took his hostly duties so far as actually to propose a game of dominoes.

Finally, at four-thirty, Frédéric, who had been there since noon, suddenly stood up, declaring he was done waiting.

"I simply can't understand it," replied the owner with an air of deliberate candor. "This is the first time Monsieur Ledoux hasn't stopped in!"

"What—Ledoux?"

"Yes, of course, monsieur!"

"I said Regimbart!" cried Frédéric in exasperation.

"Oh, please, a thousand pardons—but you seem to have made a mistake! Isn't that so, Madame Alexandre? Didn't the gentleman ask for Monsieur Ledoux?" Then, questioning the waiter, "You heard him, didn't you, the same as I?"

No doubt to exact a little revenge on his boss, the waiter simply smiled.

Frédéric took himself back out onto the boulevards, indignant at all the time he'd lost, furious with the Citizen, invoking his presence as if he were some kind of god, and resolved to find and drag the man out, even if he were hidden in the most distant wine cellar on earth. His cab was irritating him; he dismissed it; ideas were seething within him; then he raked through his memory to recover all the names of all the cafés that that imbecile had ever mentioned, and they all came back to him at once, exploding in his mind like fireworks: café

Gascard, café Grimbert, café Halbout, estaminet Bordelais, Havanais, Havrais, Boeuf-à-la-mode, brasserie Allemande, Mère Morel—and he went off to look in each one in turn. At one, Regimbart had just left; in another, he might be coming in soon; in a third, he hadn't been seen for six months; and at another he had ordered, yesterday, a leg of lamb for Saturday. Finally at Vautier's bar, Frédéric threw open the door and bumped into the waiter.

"Do you know Monsieur Regimbart?"

"Do I know him, monsieur? I have the honor of serving him. He's upstairs; he's just finishing his dinner!"

And the proprietor, a napkin over his arm, came up to Frédéric. "You're looking for Monsieur Regimbart, monsieur? He was here just a moment ago."

Frédéric let out a curse, but the man assured him that he would definitely find him at Bouttevilain's. "I give you my word of honor! He left a little earlier than usual, because he had a meeting with some gentlemen. But you'll find him, as I said, at Bouttevilain's at 92 Rue Saint-Martin, second flight of steps on the left, in the back of the courtyard, first floor, right-hand door!"

And there he was at last, visible through the tobacco smoke, alone, sitting at the far end of the room beyond the billiard room, a mug of beer in front of him, his chin lowered onto his chest, looking meditative.

"It's you at last! I've been looking for you all day."

Regimbart did not budge, only extending two fingers to him, and showing no particular emotion, just as if they had seen each other the previous day, he dropped a few insignificant remarks on the day's legislative session.

Frédéric interrupted him, saying, in the most natural voice he could summon, "How is Arnoux doing?"

The response took a long time. Regimbart gargled with his drink. "Oh, not so bad!"

"So, where is he living nowadays?"

"It's . . . Rue Paradis-Poissonnière," said the Citizen, startled.

"What number?"

"Thirty-seven, for heaven's sake—what's wrong with you?"

Frédéric got up.

"What, now you're leaving?"

"Yes, yes, I have an errand, something I forgot to do! Goodbye!" Frédéric left the bar and went straight to Arnoux's, as if carried there on a warm wind, feeling that bizarre ease and comfort that one feels in dreams.

He found himself on the third floor, standing in front of a door, the bell ringing; a servant appeared; a second door opened; Arnoux jumped up and gave him a hug. Madame Arnoux was sitting by the fireside, on her lap a little boy of around three; her daughter, now as tall as she, stood on the other side of the fireplace.

"Allow me to introduce you to this little gentleman," said Arnoux, picking the boy up by his armpits.

"You're going to kill him! Good God! Stop it!" cried Madame Arnoux.

But Arnoux swore there was no danger and continued to hold him like that, muttering baby talk to the boy, using the dialect of Marseille, where he'd been born. "Ah, little sweetie! My pretty little bird!" Then he asked Frédéric why he'd gone so long without writing, and if he'd been able to accomplish what he'd wanted to down there. "As for me, I'm dealing in porcelain now. But let's talk about you."

Frédéric made his excuses by referring to a long lawsuit and to his mother's health, exaggerating in hopes of making himself interesting. But, in short, he was in Paris to stay now, and definitively this time; he said nothing about the inheritance—fearing it would make his previous life look bad.

The curtains, of brown wool damask, matched the upholstery on the furniture; two pillows lay side by side against the bolster; a hot-water bottle was warming on the coals; the shade on the lamp, on the edge of the sideboard, made the room dark and somber. Madame Arnoux was wearing a dressing gown of dark blue merino. Her gaze resting on the fire, one hand on the little boy's shoulder, she was undoing the laces of his vest with the other while the brat—just like little Alexandre Junior—scratched his head and cried.

Frédéric had expected to be overcome with spasms of joy—but our passions weaken when they are transplanted to new surroundings, and not finding Madame Arnoux in the environment where he had first known her, he thought she had somehow lost something, had been lessened, and it felt confusedly like a degradation; anyway, it just wasn't the same. The calmness of his own feelings astonished him. He asked about the other old friends, Pellerin among others.

"I don't see him very often," said Arnoux.

She added: "We don't entertain the way we used to."

Was that a hint that he shouldn't expect an invitation? But Arnoux continued to be friendly, reproaching him for not dropping in to have dinner with them; and he explained why he'd made a change in his business. "What do you expect in decadent times like these? Great paintings are out of fashion! But still, you can have art anywhere. You know me, how much I love Beauty! I'll have to take you out to my factory one of these days."

And he wanted to show him, right away, some of the products in his shop downstairs.

Dishes, soup tureens, plates, and basins were scattered all over the floor. Big floor tiles, for bathrooms, leaned up against the wall, decorated with mythological subjects in the Renaissance style, while in the middle of the room there was a tall double set of shelves that held pots for ice, flower vases, candle holders, little jardinières, and big statuettes in polychrome, representing Africans or Pompadour shepherdesses. Frédéric, cold and hungry, found Arnoux's displays boring.

He hurried off to the Café Anglais and ordered a sumptuous meal; while eating, he said to himself: "I'm well rid of all that misery! She hardly recognized me! What a bourgeois housewife!"

And in a sudden upswelling of health, he started making personal resolutions. He felt his heart grow as hard as the table on which his elbows rested. So now he could throw himself into the midst of life, with no fears. The thought of the Dambreuses occurred to him; he would make use of them; then he recalled Deslauriers. "Oh, that's not good." But still he sent off, via a messenger, a note inviting him to meet the next day at the Palais-Royal, before having lunch together.

Good luck had not come Deslauriers's way.

He had presented his thesis at the State examining board, concerning "the right to make a will," in which he argued that this right should be restricted as far as was possible—and, his questioner goading him into saying stupid things, he obliged and said quite a few, while the examiners sat looking on impassively. Then, as luck would have it, he drew the "statute of limitations" for the subject of his extemporaneous lecture. Deslauriers tossed out a series of deplorable theories on the subject: old cases should be treated the same as new ones; why should the owner of a house be deprived of his property

simply because he was not allowed to show his proof of ownership until thirty-one years had passed?[3] This amounted to handing over a decent man's property to the heir of a successful thief. Every sort of injustice was enshrined by extending this right, which amounted simply to tyranny, the abuse of power! He was so wound up that he went on to exclaim, "Abolish it! And if we do, the Franks will no longer oppress the Gauls, the English the Irish, the Yankees the Redskins, the Turks the Arabs, the whites the blacks, the Polish . . ."

The head examiner interrupted him: "Enough! Enough! Monsieur, this is not the place for your political opinions; you can present yourself again later."

Deslauriers didn't want to present himself a second time. But that miserable chapter XX of the third book of the Civil Code had become a huge stumbling block for him. He began drafting a massive work on "The Statute of Limitations Considered as the Basis for Civil Law and the Natural Rights of Peoples"; he had plunged headlong into Dunod, Rogerius, Balbus, Merlin, Vazeille, Savigny, Troplong,[4] and various other formidable readings. In order to devote more time to it, he had quit his position as head clerk. He scratched out a living by giving lessons and writing theses; and in the Orsay debating society, his virulence terrified the conservatives, all the young disciples of Monsieur Guizot—and he did this so effectively that in some quarters he was gaining a certain degree of celebrity, though this was mixed somewhat with a general mistrust of him as a person.

He arrived at his meeting with Frédéric wearing a heavy coat lined with red flannel, just like the one Sénécal used to wear. Not wanting to make a show for the passersby, they kept their embraces brief, then went arm in arm to Véfour's, giggly with pleasure, tears in the corners of their eyes. Then, once they were alone, Deslauriers cried, "Good God—we're going to have good times now!"

Frédéric didn't much like the way Deslauriers seemed to take joint possession of his inheritance. His friend was expressing too much joy at the picture he painted of the two of them together, and not enough simply for Frédéric himself.

Later, Deslauriers told the story of his failure, and bit by bit he revealed his work, the way he was living, speaking about himself with stoicism but about others with bitterness. Nothing made him happy.

Not one man in office wasn't a moron or a crook. He lashed out at the waiter over a glass that hadn't been rinsed properly, and when Frédéric reproved him mildly for it: "As if I'm going to bother about fools like that—they make six to eight thousand a year, and they've got the vote, they're maybe even able to run for office![5] Oh no—not me!"

Then, in a suddenly cheery tone: "Ah, but I forgot I'm talking to a capitalist here, a Mondor—because yes, you really are a Mondor now![6]"

And returning to the theme of inheritance, he proposed this thesis: that collateral succession (a thing unjust in itself, but a delight in this case) would be abolished one of these days, at the next revolution.

"You think so?" said Frédéric.

"Count on it!" he replied. "It can't go on! There's too much suffering! When I see men of genius like Sénécal in poverty . . ."

Always Sénécal, thought Frédéric.

"But what else is new? Are you still in love with Madame Arnoux? That's all over, isn't it?"

Not knowing how to respond, Frédéric lowered his eyes and bowed his head.

Deslauriers went on, telling Frédéric that the paper Arnoux used to run was now owned by Hussonnet, who had changed it dramatically. It was now called *Art,* and it was "a literary institution, a company with shares at a hundred francs each, and total capital—forty thousand francs," and each shareholder could submit copy to it, because "the aim of the institution is to publish work by newcomers, to help talent and, perhaps, genius avoid the terrible crises that would otherwise overwhelm them, and so forth—you know the spiel!" But there was one thing that could still be done, and that was to raise the tone of said publication, and then, all at once, retaining all the same editors and promising them to keep the paper going, surprise the subscribers with a political paper; it wouldn't take an enormous amount of money.

"What do you think? Should we? Want to try?"

Frédéric didn't reject the idea. But he needed time to sort out his affairs. "Meanwhile, if you need anything . . ."

"Thanks, old friend!" said Deslauriers.

After that, they smoked cheroots, leaning out on the plush velvet windowsill. The sun was shining, the air smelled sweet, flocks of birds swooped down into the garden; statues of bronze and marble,

washed clean by the rain, gleamed; maids wearing aprons were sitting on benches and chatting; and they could hear the laughter of children, along with the continuous murmur of the fountain.

Frédéric felt uneasy about the degree of Deslauriers's bitterness; but when the wine began to circulate in his veins and he was half dozing off, indolent, the sun shining on his face, he soon felt nothing more than a sense of immense well-being, a voluptuous stupor—like a plant steeped in warmth and moisture. Deslauriers, eyes half-closed, was gazing vaguely off into the distance. His chest swelled, and he began to speak: "Ah, all this was much more beautiful back then, when Camille Desmoulins stood over there on that table and urged the people on to the Bastille![7] You were really alive then, you could assert yourself, use your strength! Ordinary lawyers gave orders to generals, barefooted crowds attacked kings—but nowadays . . ."

He went silent for a moment, then suddenly: "Never mind—the future is going to be great!"

Then, beating out a charge on the window pane, he recited these lines from Barthélemy:

It'll be back, that terrible Assembly
That still troubles your head, forty years on,
A colossus that marches on fearlessly.[8]

"I don't remember the rest! But it's late—shall we go?" And when they were out in the street, he continued talking about his theories.

Frédéric wasn't listening; instead, he was looking in the shop windows as they passed, keeping an eye out for fabrics and furniture for his new rooms; and it may have been the thought of Madame Arnoux that made him stop in front of a second-hand dealer's shop, his attention caught by three faience plates. They were decorated with yellow arabesques, with a metallic sheen, and they cost one hundred écus each. Frédéric had them put aside for him.

"If I were you," said Deslauriers, "I'd buy silver instead," revealing by this love of showy display the man of humble origins.

When he was finally alone, Frédéric went to the renowned Pomadère's, where he ordered three pairs of trousers, two coats, a fur coat, and five waistcoats; from there he went to a bootmaker, then

a shirtmaker, then a hatter, in each place asking for his order to be ready as soon as possible.

Three days later, in the evening, upon his return from Le Havre, he found a complete wardrobe delivered to his rooms; impatient to put the new clothes to use, he decided on the spot to go call on the Dambreuses. But it was too early—barely eight o'clock.

Maybe I should go see the others, he thought.

Arnoux, alone in front of his mirror, was in the process of shaving. He suggested taking Frédéric somewhere that he might enjoy himself, and upon hearing Frédéric mention the name of Dambreuse, "Ah, perfect! You'll see his friends at this place, so do come! It'll be fun."

Frédéric was begging off when Madame Arnoux recognized his voice and greeted him through the partition, for her daughter was ill and she herself not feeling well; he could hear the clink of a spoon against a glass, and all the little rustling sounds of things being moved around that one hears in a sickroom. Then Arnoux disappeared to say goodbye to his wife. He piled up all the reasons he could for going out.

"But you know how serious it is! I really have to go, I'm needed there, they're waiting for me!"

"Off you go then, my friend. Have fun!"

Arnoux hailed a cab. "Palais-Royal! Number 7, Galerie Montpensier."

Then, letting himself sink back into the cushions, "Oh, I'm worn out, old friend! It's going to be the death of me. Anyway, I'm sure it's all right for me to tell you."

And he leaned over to whisper, mysteriously, in Frédéric's ear: "I'm tracking down the copper red the Chinese used." He went on to explain about glazing and slow-firing.

When they stopped at Chevet's, Arnoux was given a large basket, which he asked to have put in the cab. Then he proceeded to pick out, "for his poor wife," some grapes, some pineapples, and some other unusual delicacies, all of which he ordered to have delivered early the next morning.

From there they went to a costume shop; the ball they were going to was to be a masquerade. Arnoux picked out a pair of blue velvet trousers with a matching jacket, as well as a red wig; Frédéric chose a domino; and they went off down the Rue de Laval, stopping in front of a house whose third floor was lit up with colored lanterns.

From the bottom of the staircase, they could already hear the sounds of violins.

"Where the devil are you taking me?" asked Frédéric.

"To a good girl's place! Nothing to fear!"

A servant opened the door for them, and they walked into the foyer, where the chairs were heaped with overcoats, cloaks, and shawls. Just then, a young woman wearing the costume of a dragoon under Louis XV came walking across the room. It was Mademoiselle Rosanette Bron, the mistress of the house.

"Well?" asked Arnoux.

"It's all settled," she replied.

"Ah—thank you, my angel!"

And he tried to embrace her.

"Hands off, you fool! You're going to spoil my makeup!"

Arnoux introduced Frédéric.

"Go right in, monsieur. You're welcome."

She swept aside a curtain, and cried out, in an emphatic voice:

"The noble Monsieur Arnoux, assistant dishwasher, and one of his princely friends."

Frédéric was dazzled at first by the lights: all he could see was a jumble of silks and velvets, bare shoulders, a great mass of colors, all swaying to the sounds of an orchestra hidden somewhere behind the greenery, between walls hung with yellow silk, with pastel portraits here and there and crystal sconces in the Louis XVI style. Tall lamps, with frosted globes like snowballs, towered over baskets of flowers on the tables in the corners—and directly across from them they could see a second room and beyond it a third, in which there was a bed with twisted posts, a Venetian mirror at its head.

The dancers all stopped, and applause broke out, along with a great murmur of delight at the sight of Arnoux walking in with his basket of fruit balanced on his head. "Watch out for the chandelier!" Frédéric raised his head: it was the old Dresden chandelier that used to hang in the office of *L'Art industriel;* images from those old days rushed through his memory now. But just then a foot soldier, wearing an informal uniform and sporting that dimwitted facial expression so common among conscripts, planted himself directly in his path, spreading his arms out wide in astonishment; and he was able to recognize, despite the grotesque over-waxed black moustaches that disfigured his face, his old friend Hussonnet. In a bizarre accent that

was half Alsatian and half African, the bohemian showered congratulations on him, calling him "my colonel."

A baton was rapped against a music stand, and the dancers all took their places.

There were about sixty people, the women mostly dressed as village girls or aristocrats, and the men, nearly all of them of mature years, dressed as carters, stevedores, or sailors.

Frédéric stationed himself against a wall and watched the quadrille in front of him.

An aging beau, dressed as a doge of Venice, with a long purple gown of silk, was dancing with Madame Rosanette, who was wearing a green coat, with knitted trousers and soft leather boots with golden spurs. The couple across from him consisted of an Albanian, weighed down with yatagans,[9] and a blue-eyed Swiss girl, white as milk and plump as a quail, dressed in shirtsleeves and a red bodice. To show off her hair, which came down almost to her knees, a tall blond dancer, one with bit parts at the Opéra, had got herself up as a savage; she wore nothing over her brown tights but a leather loincloth, with some glass bracelets and a tinsel tiara, from which sprouted a set of peacock feathers. Directly in front of her stood a Pritchard, wearing an absurdly oversized black coat and beating time on his snuffbox with his elbow.[10] A little shepherd out of a Watteau painting, all in moonlight blue and silver, was tapping his crook against the thyrsus of a Bacchante, who was wearing a crown of grapes, a leopard skin over her left shoulder, and buskins trimmed with gold ribbons. Across from them, a Polish woman in a short jacket of orange velvet swirled her gauze skirt over pearl-gray silk stockings fitted into pink boots trimmed with white fur. She was smiling at a forty-something man with a paunch, dressed as a choirboy; he was leaping about, lifting his surplice with one hand while keeping his red skullcap fixed in place with the other. But the queen, the star of the show, was Madamoiselle Loulou, a celebrity of the dance halls. Finding herself temporarily flush with money, she was wearing a wide lace collar over a plain black velvet waistcoat; and her wide, flame-red silk trousers, fitted tightly across her hips, were belted by a cashmere scarf; the seams, all the way down, were decorated with tiny white gardenias. Her face was pale and slightly puffy, and her turned-up nose gave her an impudent air—even more impudent than the tousled periwig and man's gray felt hat that clung perilously atop it, cocked over her right ear[11];

and when she kicked her feet high, the diamonds on her shoe buckles nearly scraped the nose of her neighbor, a grand baron out of the Middle Ages almost entirely caged up in a suit of armor. And there was an Angel as well, golden sword in hand and two swan's wings on her back, who was stumbling this way and that, losing her Louis XIV partner, unable to comprehend the figures required by the dance, and throwing the whole quadrille into chaos.

Watching these people, Frédéric felt ill at ease, as if he'd been abandoned there. He began to think again of Madame Arnoux, and now he felt as if to be here were somehow to be involved in a conspiracy of aggression against her.

When the quadrille was over, Madame Rosanette came up to him. She was a little out of breath, and her gorget—polished, shining like a mirror—rose and fell slightly below her chin.

"What about you, monsieur?" she asked. "You aren't dancing?"

Frédéric excused himself; he didn't know how to dance.

"Really! Not even with me? Are you sure?"

And she leaned toward him, standing on one leg, the other slightly behind, and stroked the mother-of-pearl hilt of her sword as she considered him for a minute, with an air that was half pleading, half mocking. At last she said, "Bonsoir," executed a pirouette, and disappeared.

Frédéric, irritated with himself, not knowing what to do, began walking around the place.

He walked into the boudoir, upholstered in pale blue silk, embroidered with bunches of wildflowers, while up on the ceiling, within a circular frame of gilt wood, little cupids flew out of an azure sky and frolicked in clouds of eiderdown. Such refinements, which would seem contemptibly paltry to the Rosanettes of our day, dazzled him, and he admired all of it: the artificial convolvulus around the edges of the mirror, the curtains over the fireplace, the Turkish divan and, off in a little alcove, a kind of tent with hangings of pink silk covered with white muslin. Black furniture, decorated with brass, adorned the bedroom, where a dais, covered with swanskin, arose, and atop it stood a huge, canopied bed, adorned with ostrich feathers. Pins, trimmed with precious stones, stood in pincushions, rings lay on trays, lockets with golden frames and caskets of silver stood out in the shadows, lit by the dim light gleaming from a Bohemian glass bowl that hung from

the ceiling, suspended by three chains. Through a little door, half open, he could make out a greenhouse, taking up the whole width of the terrace, terminating in an aviary at the farthest end.

All this was a scene designed to charm him. In a sudden eruption of his own youthfulness, he resolved that from now on he was going to enjoy himself, and the feeling gave him renewed courage; then, returning to the salon where the greatest number of people were gathered (everything seeming wrapped in a kind of luminous, powdery haze), he stayed there, standing still and contemplating the quadrilles, squinting a little in order to see better—and breathing in the women's soft scents, which hovered in the air like an immense, universal kiss.

But just there, on the other side of the door, was Pellerin—Pellerin wearing full evening dress, his left arm tucked inside his coat, and his right clutching his hat and a torn white glove.

"Well, well—haven't seen you in quite a while! Where the devil did you get off to? Traveling probably, in Italy? What a cliché, eh, Italy? Not all it's made out to be? Doesn't matter! Bring your sketches over to me one of these days."

And without waiting for a reply, the artist proceeded to talk about himself. He had made terrific progress, having finally come to see the stupidity of the Line. One shouldn't be looking for Beauty and Unity in a work, but rather character, and variety.

"Since everything exists in nature, everything is a legitimate subject, everything is material for us. It's just a question of striking the right note—that's all that matters. I've discovered the secret!" With this, he nudged Frédéric with his elbow and kept repeating: "I've discovered the secret, you see! There—look at that woman with the sphinx hairdo, the one dancing with the Russian postilion: it's clear, sharp, solid, all a matter of planes and raw colors—see the indigo under the eyes, that touch of scarlet on the cheeks, the bit of sepia on the temples—dab, dab!" And he began miming, with his thumb, the act of dabbing with a brush in the air. "Now, as for that fat one over there," he continued, pointing to a fishwife wearing a cherry-colored dress with a golden cross at her neck and a knotted linen scarf hanging down her back, "that's nothing but curves; see her nostrils flaring, to match the wings of her cap, the mouth turned up at the corners, the sagging chin, the whole thing thick, melting, abundant, serene and

sunny—a real Rubens! So where is the real type?" He warmed to the subject. "What is a beautiful woman? What is beauty? Oh, you'll say that beauty is . . ." Frédéric interrupted him to ask about a Pierrot with a goatlike profile who was going about blessing each of the dancers as they performed a *pastourelle.*[12]

"A nobody! Widower, father of three boys. They run around wearing nothing but rags while he spends his time at his club and sleeps with the housemaid."

"And what about that one, in a judge's costume, sitting on the windowsill talking to the Pompadour marquise?"

"The marquise is Madame Vandaël, formerly an actress at the Gymnase, mistress to the Doge, the Comte de Palazot. They've been together twenty years now; nobody knows why. But long ago that woman had such beautiful eyes! The Citizen talking to her is named Captain d'Herbigny, one of the old boys, whose entire fortune consists of his *Croix d'honneur* and his pension; he plays the uncle to girls on certain solemn occasions, sets up duels, and dines at other people's houses."

"You mean he's a kind of lowlife, then?"

"Not at all! Perfectly decent sort."

"Ah!"

The artist continued, pointing out several others, when he caught sight of a gentleman dressed, like the doctors in Molière, in a large black serge gown, but completely open in the front, so as to show off all the charms and trinkets he was wearing.

"There you see Doctor Des Rogis. Furious at never having become a celebrity, he wrote a book of medical pornography, continues to lick the boots of everyone in high society, and is always discreet; these women adore him. He and his wife—the skinny chatelaine over there with the gray dress—trot around together to every possible public event, and the other kind too. Despite their lack of money, they still have an 'at-home' day—artistic tea parties where he recites poetry—but watch out!"

The doctor was in fact coming right up to them; and soon the three were chatting together in the entryway to the salon, forming a group that Hussonet soon joined, then the lover of the Savage Woman, a young poet who revealed, beneath a short cloak in the style of François I, the puniest of all possible physiques, and then a

clever young fellow dressed as a Turkish peddler. But his gold-braided jacket had traveled so many miles on the backs of so many itinerant dentists—his wide, red pleated trousers were so faded—his turban, rolled up like a grilled eel, looked so beat up—in fact his whole costume was so worn, so deplorable, that the women didn't even try to dissimulate their disgust. The doctor consoled him by lavishing praise on his mistress, who was dressed as a stevedore. This Turk was the son of a banker.

Between two quadrilles, Rosanette moved over toward the fireplace, where a rotund little old man was sitting in an easy chair, wearing a brown coat with gold buttons. Despite his sunken cheeks, and the jowls that hung down over his high white cravat, his hair was still blond and naturally curly, like a poodle's, which gave him a somewhat frisky air.

She bent down close to his face to listen to him. Then she turned to serve him a glass of fruit syrup; and nothing could have been more charming than the sight of her hands peeking out from the lace cuffs that protruded from the sleeves of her green tunic. When the old man finished the glass, he kissed them.

"But that's Monsieur Oudry, Arnoux's neighbor!"

"Not anymore!" said Pellerin with a laugh.

"What do you mean?"

A postilion from Longjumeau seized her by the waist as a waltz began.[13] And then all the women, who had been sitting around the room on benches, sprung up and got into a line, and they—and their skirts, their stoles, and their coiffures—all began spinning around.

And they were spinning so close to him that Frédéric could see little drops of sweat on their foreheads; the gyrating motion, growing ever stronger, more regular, more dizzying, aroused a kind of intoxication in his mind, out of which other images surged up, while all those women were passing in front of him in a dazzling stream, each of them, with her unique beauty, arousing in him a different variety of excitement. The Polish woman, who had given herself languorously to the dance, made him wish he could hold her tight against his heart while the two of them rode in a sleigh, crossing snow-covered fields. Then other, equally voluptuous horizons opened up—the shores of a lake, a chalet—as the Swiss girl danced past; she waltzed with her torso held stiffly, her eyes lowered. Then suddenly the Bacchante,

her dark head leaning back, made him imagine, amid the confused rattle of tambourines, all-engulfing caresses in groves of oleander, a storm breaking overhead. The Fishwife, out of breath at the rapidity of the dance, was laughing; and he wished he could go off and drink with her at Les Porcherons,[14] crumpling her neckerchief in his hands, as people did in the old days. But the Stevedore, so light on her feet that she seemed barely to touch the floor, seemed to gather up, in the suppleness of her legs and the seriousness of her expression, all the refinements of modern love, which is as precise as science, as mobile as a bird. Rosanette twirled around, hand on hip; the knot of her hairpiece, bobbing up and down on her collar, scattered orris root powder all around her; and with every twirl the tip of her golden spurs nearly caught Frédéric.

As the final chord of the waltz sounded, Mademoiselle Vatnaz came in, an Algerian kerchief on her head, a set of piastres on her forehead, and mascara under her eyes, and a sort of coat in black cashmere was draped down over her light-colored skirt trimmed with silver lamé; in her hand she held a Basque tambourine.

Behind her walked a big fellow costumed to look like Dante; this was—for she no longer tried to conceal it—none other than the singer from the Alhambra. His name was Auguste Delamare, but he had originally called himself Anténor Dellamare, then Delmas, then Belmar, and finally Delmar, thus honing and perfecting his name as his celebrity grew, for he had left the music hall behind now and had moved to the theater, making his debut recently, to great acclaim, in *Gaspardo le Pêcheur* at the Ambigu.[15]

When Hussonet caught sight of him, he frowned. Since the rejection of his own play, he detested actors. You can't imagine the sheer vanity of these little gentlemen, Messieurs—and this one in particular! "What a poser—just look at him!"

After a slight nod to Rosanette, Delmar stationed himself in front of the fireplace; and there he stood, motionless, one hand on his heart, his left foot forward, eyes cast heavenward, with his laurel wreath atop his hood, all of it geared toward making his gaze seem poetic, to fascinate the ladies. They all came up, even from the far corners of the room, and formed a circle around him.

But Mademoiselle Vatnaz, after giving Rosanette a long embrace, turned and began begging Hussonet to help her improve the style of a

book she hoped to publish: *The Young Person's Garland,* it was titled, an anthology of literary and moral pieces. The man of letters promised to help. She went on to ask whether he couldn't get some enthusiastic reviews of her friend printed in one of the papers he wrote for, and maybe even help get him a part later on. Hussonet was so stunned by the request that he forgot to take a glass of punch.

Arnoux had brewed the punch; and trailed by the Comte's groom, who toted an empty tray, he proceeded to offer it around with great satisfaction.

He had just given a glass to Monsieur Oudry when Rosanette stopped him.

"What about that matter?"

He blushed slightly; then, turning to the old man, "Our friend here tells me that you might be willing to . . ."

"Why, certainly, neighbor! At your service."

And the name of Monsieur Dambreuse was spoken; but because they were speaking in low voices, Frédéric could not quite make out what they were saying; he moved over to the other side of the fireplace, where Rosanette and Delmar were now chatting.

The ham actor had a face that was like a stage set, in that it was vulgar up close, meant to be viewed from a distance; his hands were thick, his feet big, his jaw drooping; and he was in the middle of a scornful commentary on all the most celebrated actors, occasionally sneering at poets and frequently referring to "my vocal organ, my physique, my methods," salting into his discourse words he scarcely understood, like "morbidezza,"[16] "analog," and "homogeneity."

Rosanette listened, making little nods of approval. Her growing admiration was visible in the coloring that rose beneath the rouge on her cheeks, and a certain moistness seemed to pass over her bright eyes, those eyes of an indefinable color, like a veil. How could a man like this possibly charm her? Frédéric inwardly made an effort to despise him even more, perhaps to eliminate the envy that he was in fact feeling.

Now Mademoiselle Vatnaz was with Arnoux; and even though she was laughing very vigorously, she kept casting glances at her friend, Rosanette; and Monsieur Oudry likewise never took his eyes off her.

Then Arnoux and Vatnaz disappeared; and the old man came over to speak quietly with Rosanette.

"Ah, all right then—it's settled! Leave me alone now."

And she asked Frédéric if he would please go and see if Arnoux was in the kitchen.

The floor there was covered with row after row of half-empty glasses; and the saucepans, the pots, the turbot-kettle were all quivering on the stove. Arnoux, using the familiar *tu,* was giving orders to the domestics, stirring the gravy, tasting the sauces, joking with the maid.

"Good," he said, "let her know I'm about to serve."

No one was dancing anymore; the women had taken their seats again, while the men strolled about. In the middle of the drawing room, one of the window curtains was billowing in the wind; and the Sphinx, despite everyone's admonitions, was exposing her sweaty arms to the cool air. But where was Rosanette? Frédéric looked all over for her, even in the boudoir and the bedroom. A few couples, seeking a place to be alone, had taken refuge there. Whispers and stifled laughter could be heard in the bedroom's darkness, and he could just make out fans quivering over the bosoms of dresses, moving slowly, gently, like the wings of an injured bird.

As he entered the greenhouse, he saw, stretched out beneath the broad leaves of a caladium by the fountain, Delmar, lying on his belly on the canvas couch; Rosanette, sitting close to him, was stroking his hair with her fingers; and the two were gazing at each other. Just then, Arnoux entered from the aviary side. Delmar leaped up in a single bound, then turned and walked away with slow, deliberate steps; he even paused by the door to stop and pick a hibiscus bloom, which he inserted into his buttonhole. Rosanette hung her head; Frédéric, who was watching her in profile, could tell that she was crying.

"What is it? What's the matter?" Arnoux asked.

She shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

"Is it because of him?" he continued.

She draped her arms around his neck, and kissing him on the forehead, said slowly, "You know I'll always love you, my big boy. Let's forget about it. Let's go eat some supper!"

The room, its walls almost entirely covered by the old porcelain plates hanging there, was illuminated by a brass chandelier with forty candles; and that harsh light, falling directly down upon it, accentuated the whiteness of the enormous turbot occupying the center of the tablecloth, among the hors-d'oeuvres and the fruit; all around

the table, forming a border, were laid out dishes of bisque soup. Their gowns rustling, the women tucked in their skirts, their sleeves, and their shawls, sitting down one after another; men, standing, stationed themselves in the corners. Pellerin and Monsieur Oudry were seated by Rosanette; Arnoux sat across from her. Palazot and his mistress had just left.

"Bon voyage, everybody!" she said. "Let's get to this food!"

The Choirboy, being quite a wit, made a sweeping sign of the cross and began saying the *Benedicite.* The women—especially the Fishwife, who had a daughter she hoped to mold into a respectable woman—were scandalized. Arnoux felt the same, saying he "didn't go for that kind of thing," believing one ought to respect religion.

A German clock, furnished with a rooster, chimed out two o'clock, giving rise to many pleasantries concerning the cuckoo.[17] And this led to all sorts of chatter—puns, anecdotes, boasts, bets, lies taken for truths, improbable assertions—a tumult of words that eventually died down into several separate conversations. Wines circulated, one course followed another; the Doctor carved. Someone threw an orange, someone else a cork; people got up to talk with others. Rosanette frequently turned back to Delmar, who was standing motionless behind her; Pellerin talked on, and Monsieur Oudry smiled. Mademoiselle Vatnaz ate, almost entirely by herself, a whole dish of crayfish, crunching the shells between her long teeth. The Angel, perching on the piano stool (the only place her wings allowed her to sit), was chewing constantly, never stopping.

"What a spread!" the Choirboy kept repeating, as if dumbstruck; "what a spread!"

The Sphinx was drinking brandy, yelling at the top of her voice, and thrashing about like a demon. Suddenly her cheeks swelled up, and no longer able to fight back the blood filling her mouth, put her napkin against her lips and then threw it under the table.

Frédéric had seen it all.

"It's nothing!"

And when he urged her to go home and take care of herself, she replied slowly, "Oh, what's the use? If I didn't have this, I'd have something else. Life isn't all fun and games!"

He shuddered at that, feeling a sudden icy sadness, as if he'd just caught a glimpse of whole worlds of misery and despair, a coal bucket

standing beside a trestle bed, the corpses in the morgue with leather aprons, cold water trickling over their hair.[18]

But then Hussonet, crouched down by the feet of the Savage Woman, bellowed out hoarsely, in imitation of the actor Grassot:[19] "Do not be cruel, O Celuta![20] Isn't this little family party a delight? Oh, intoxicate my senses, my loves! Come, let us frolic! Let us frolic!"

And with that, he began kissing women on their shoulders. They shuddered at the prickly touch of his moustache; then he came up with the idea of breaking a plate over his head, just by giving it a little slap. Others began to do the same; bits and pieces of porcelain plates were flying about like tiles in a windstorm, and the Stevedore cried out: "Don't worry! It doesn't cost us anything! The bourgeois who makes them gives them to us for free."

All eyes turned to Arnoux. He replied, "Ah, but the payment will come due!" He was hoping that saying this would leave everyone in doubt as to whether he really was Rosanette's lover still.

But then two furious voices rose up.

"Imbecile!"

"Scoundrel!"

"At your service!"

"And I at yours!"

The Medieval Knight and the Russian Postilion were quarreling; the latter had claimed that if one wore a suit of armor, one didn't need to be courageous, and the former had taken offense at this. They wanted to fight; everyone tried to interpose, and the Captain tried to make himself heard above all the din.

"Gentlemen, listen to me! Just a word! I have experience, gentlemen!"

Rosanette, having rapped her glass with her knife, was the one who finally got everyone to quiet down; and first addressing the Knight, who had kept his helmet on, and then the Postilion, who was wearing a shaggy fur cap: "All right—first you, take that saucepan off your head! It makes me hot just looking at it! And then you, over there, take off your wolf's head. You'd better obey me, dammit! Look here, look at my epaulettes! I'm your Field Marshal!"

They did as she commanded, and everyone applauded and shouted out: "Long live the Marshal! Long live the Marshal!"

Then, taking a bottle of champagne that had been standing on the stove, she lifted it up and poured it from on high into the glasses that

were offered to her. The table was too big, so the guests, the women in particular, leaned over toward her, standing on tiptoe or balancing on the bars of the chairs, and for just a moment they formed a pyramidal grouping of coiffures, bare shoulders, extended arms, stretched bodies—and long jets of wine began to spray over the whole group, for the Pierrot and Arnoux, standing in opposite corners of the room, each took a bottle and made it splatter all over their faces. The little birds from the aviary—the door of which had been left open—now began to invade the room, fluttering around the chandelier, banging up against the windows, against the furniture; and some, alighting on women's heads, made them appear to be wearing great flowers in their hair.

The musicians had gone. The piano was hauled from the foyer into the drawing room. Mademoiselle Vatnaz sat down to it, and accompanied by the Choirboy on his Basque tambourine, she began pounding out a contredanse, hitting the keys furiously, like a horse champing at the bit, swaying from side to side in time with the rhythm. The Marshal grabbed hold of Frédéric, Hussonet began doing cartwheels, the Stevedore posed clownishly, the Pierrot imitated an orangutan, the Savage Woman stretched out her arms and imitated the rocking of a boat. Finally, worn out, they all stopped, and someone opened a window.

The early daylight flooded into the room, as did the cool air of the morning. There was an exclamation of surprise, then silence. The yellow flames flickered, some of them cracking their drip-shields; ribbons, flowers, pearls lay strewn across the floor; punch and syrup stains could be seen on the small tables; the chair covers were soiled and the costumes rumpled, covered with powder; and makeup, running with sweat, revealed pallid faces with reddened, blinking eyes.

But the Marshal, as fresh as if she'd just stepped out of a bath, had pink cheeks and shining eyes. She tossed her man's wig off into a corner, and her hair tumbled down around her like a fleece, so that the only part of her costume visible now were the trousers, which produced an effect at once comical and sweet.

The Sphinx, her teeth chattering with fever, asked for a shawl.

Rosanette ran into her bedroom to fetch her one, and when the other woman followed her, she slammed the door in her face.

The Turk observed, aloud, that no one had seen Monsieur Oudry leave. But so fatigued was the whole group that nobody picked up on that piece of gossip.

Then, standing and waiting for the coaches, they wrapped themselves up in cloaks and coats. Seven o'clock sounded. The Angel remained inside, sitting in front of a plate of sardines and butter; and the Fishwife, sitting next to her, was smoking cigarettes and giving her advice on life.

Finally the cabs arrived, and the guests departed: Husonnet, Paris correspondent for a provincial paper, had to read fifty-three papers before lunch; the Savage Woman had a rehearsal at her theater, Pellerin a model, and the Choirboy three separate assignations. But the Angel, overwhelmed by the first sensations of indigestion, couldn't get up, so the Medieval Baron carried her to a cab.

"Careful with her wings!" the Stevedore called down from a window.

They were on the landing when Mademoiselle Vatnaz said to Rosanette, "Adieu, dear friend! It was wonderful, your party." Then, whispering in her ear, "Keep him!"

"Till better times," the Marshal replied, slowly turning away.

Arnoux and Frédéric found themselves leaving together, just the way they had come in. The porcelain merchant seemed in a somber mood, which his companion interpreted as his not feeling well.

"Me? Not at all!"

He kept chewing at his moustache and frowning, so Frédéric asked him if he was worried about some business affair.

"Not at all!"

Then, abruptly: "You know him, don't you, old Oudry?"

And then, with a bitter expression: "He's rich, the old devil!"

Arnoux went on to talk about a major firing that was to be completed that day at his factory. He wanted to oversee it. The train left in an hour. "But I need to stop home and kiss my wife."

Ah! His wife! thought Frédéric.

He went home to bed, but with an intense headache; he drank a carafe of water to slake his thirst.

But another thirst overtook him, the thirst for women, for luxury, for everything that made up Parisian life. He felt slightly confused, like a man coming down off a ship; and in the hallucination of his first sleep, he saw—passing and then repassing before his eyes—the bare shoulders of the Fishwife, the breasts of the Stevedore, the calves of the Polish Girl, the hairdo of the Savage Woman. But then two large black eyes appeared, eyes that had not been at the party; and light and

airy as a butterfly, aflame as a torch, they came and went, flickered, ascended to the ceiling, descended to his lips. Frédéric sought frantically to recognize those eyes, but without success. But now the dream took hold of him entirely; he felt that he was harnessed, alongside Arnoux, between the shafts of a cab, and that the Marshal was straddling him, digging open his entrails with her golden spurs.

II

Frédéric found a small townhouse on the corner of the Rue Rumford,[21] and he bought it, along with a coupé, a horse, furnishings, and two flower stands purchased from Arnoux's establishment. The flower stands were to be placed on either side of the drawing-room door. Behind this drawing room were a bedroom and a study. It occurred to him that Deslauriers could live there. But how could he receive *her,* his future mistress, if he did? The presence of a friend would be a problem. He ended up having the partition removed in order to give the drawing-room more depth, and he turned the study into a smoking room.

He bought volumes of all the poets he admired, travel books, atlases, dictionaries, for he had an infinite number of projects in mind; he pushed the workmen to go faster, he ran around to the shops, and, impatient to enjoy his possessions, he bought everything without even trying to bargain.

But when the merchants' bills came in, Frédéric realized that he was going to have to pay out around forty thousand francs, apart from the taxes on his inheritance, which would be over thirty-seven thousand; since his fortune consisted of land, he wrote to the Le Havre notary to put some of it up for sale in order to pay off his debts and have some money left to spend. Then, wishing to get to know, finally, that vague, gleaming thing known as *high society,* he sent a note to the Dambreuses asking if he could pay a call on them. Madame replied that she would look forward to his visit the next day.

It was the Dambreuse at-home day. Coaches were parked in the courtyard. Two valets hurried over to him from under an awning, and a third walked ahead of him.

He crossed an entry room, then a second room, then a grand drawing-room with high windows. The monumental fireplace sup-

ported a spherical clock, flanked by two monstrous porcelain vases, and from each of these sprung up a cluster of sconces, like golden bushes. Some paintings in the Espagnolet[22] manner hung on the walls; door curtains of heavy tapestry hung majestically down; and the armchairs, the consoles, the tables, and all the other pieces of furniture were in the Empire style, the effect imposing, ambassadorial.

Frédéric finally arrived in an oval room, paneled in rosewood, lit by a single window that looked out on a garden. Madame Dambreuse was seated by the fire, a dozen other people forming a circle around her. With a friendly greeting, she motioned for him to have a seat, without appearing at all surprised at not having seen him in so long.

When he came in, they were all praising the eloquence of the Abbé Coeur.[23] The conversation then turned to the immorality of servants, because there had been a recent case of a theft committed by a valet; and from there the gossip streamed freely. Old Madame de Sommery had a cold; Madame de Turvisot was getting married; the Montcharrons would not be back in town till the end of January, and the same went for the Bretancourts; nowadays people were staying in the country longer than they used to. The poverty of their conversation seemed somehow to be reinforced by the luxury of the things surrounding them; yet what they were saying was less stupid than the way they were saying it, with no aim, no coherence, and no animation. There were present, however, some men who'd known something of life: an ex-cabinet minister, the curé of a large parish, two or three high-level government functionaries; but when they spoke, they expressed nothing but the most worn-out clichés. Some looked like tired, aging dowagers, while others acted like shady horse-traders; old men were there with their wives, who could have passed for their granddaughters.

Madame Dambreuse responded to all of them with perfect grace. When someone mentioned that so-and-so was ill, she wore a sorrowful frown, and she assumed a joyful demeanor when the talk turned to balls and soirees. But she would soon have to deprive herself of their company, because she needed to go pick up one of her husband's nieces—an orphan—from her school. Everyone praised her devotion; she was behaving like a true mother.

Frédéric observed her. The skin on her face, rather pale, seemed stretched, and though it had freshness, it was as lusterless as a preserved fruit. But her hair, with its ringlets in the English style, was

finer than silk, her eyes were a brilliant azure, and all her gestures were graceful, delicate. Seated toward the back of the group on a love seat, she was toying with the red tassels of a Japanese screen, no doubt to show off her hands—long and narrow, a little thin, with fingers turned up at the tips. She was wearing a gray dress of watered silk with a high neck, like that of a Puritan.

Frédéric asked her if she would be spending any time that year at La Fortrelle. Madame Dambreuse didn't know. He said he could understand; Nogent must be boring. More visitors came in, their dresses, trailing on the carpet, creating a constant rustling sound. The women, perched on the edges of their chairs, emitted little bursts of laughter, articulated two or three words, and then, after about five minutes, left again with their daughters. Soon the conversation became impossible to follow, and Frédéric was leaving when Madame Dambreuse said, "Remember, Monsieur Moreau—every Wednesday." And that simple statement made up for all her indifference.

He was pleased. Nevertheless, he paused to breathe in deeply the air out on the street; and feeling the need for a less artificial environment, he resolved to pay a call on the Marshal.

The foyer door was open. Two Havanese lapdogs raced up to him. A voice called out: "Delphine! Delphine!—Is that you, Félix?"

He remained standing there; the two little dogs kept on yapping. Soon Rosanette appeared, wrapped in a sort of peignoir of white muslin with lace trim, her bare feet in Turkish slippers. "Oh, I'm sorry, monsieur! I thought you were the hairdresser. Just one minute! I'll be back!"

And there he stayed, alone in the dining room.

The Venetian blinds were drawn. Frédéric was gazing around the room, remembering all the brouhaha of the other night, when he noticed a man's hat on the table—an old felt hat, beat up, greasy and downright filthy. Whose hat? Impudently displaying its frayed lining, it seemed to proclaim: "I don't care what anybody thinks! I'm the master here!"

The Marshal returned. She picked up the hat, opened the greenhouse door and tossed it inside, then closed the door again (meanwhile, other doors could be heard opening and closing) and leading Frédéric through the kitchen, she brought him into her dressing room.

One could see at once that this was the most frequently used room in the house and, as it were, its spiritual command center. A bold,

leaf-patterned chintz covered the walls, the armchairs, and the huge sprung divan; a white marble table supported two large blue faience basins; the crystal shelves above it were stuffed with vials, brushes, combs, cosmetic sticks, boxes of powder; the fire was reflected in a tall cheval mirror; a sheet was draped over the edge of a bathtub; and the air was redolent with the scent of almond and benzoin.

"Do pardon the mess! Tonight I'm dining out."

And as she turned on her heel, she nearly stepped on one of the little dogs. Frédéric declared that they were charming. She picked the two of them up and lifted them, with their little black noses, to his face: "Come on now, be sweet, give monsieur a kiss."

Suddenly a man, wearing a soiled frock coat with a fur collar, came in.

"Félix, old friend," she said, "you'll get it next Sunday, for sure."

The man started doing her hair. He told her some news about her friends: Madame de Rochegune, Madame de Saint-Florentin, Madame Lombard—all nobles, as at the Dambreuse house. Then he chattered on about theaters: there was to be an unusual show that evening at the Ambigu.

"Are you going?"

"Me? Heavens no. I'm staying home."

Then Delphine came in. Rosanette chastised her for leaving the house without permission. The other swore that she'd just "got back from the market."

"All right then—show me your book! No objection to that, I trust?"

Then, reading from the notebook half-aloud, Rosanette criticized every item. The addition was wrong.

"You owe me four sous!"

Delphine handed them over, and when she had been dismissed, "Oh, Blessed Virgin! These people are nothing but trouble."

The recrimination shocked Frédéric. It reminded him too much of the others, and it established an annoying equality between the two households.

Delphine, having come back in, approached the Marshal and whispered something to her.

"No! I won't!"

Delphine tried again: "Madame, she insists."

"Oh, what a pest! Throw her out!"

Just then an old woman dressed in black pushed open the door. Frédéric heard nothing, and saw nothing; Rosanette met her and rushed her into the bedroom.

When she returned, her cheeks were red, and without saying a word she went to sit in one of the armchairs. A tear trickled onto her cheek; then, turning to the young man, she asked, her tone gentle, "What's your first name?"

"Frédéric."

"Ah! Federico! Would it bother you if I called you that?" And she gazed at him with a flirtatious, even almost tender, expression. But then she suddenly whooped for joy at the sight of Mademoiselle Vatnaz.

The artiste had no time to waste, because she had to preside over the table at her boardinghouse precisely at six; she was out of breath, and couldn't say much more. Then she pulled a watch chain out of her shopping bag, along with a piece of paper and other various items she had bought.

"Do you know, on the Rue Joubert there are some splendid Swedish gloves for thirty-six sous! Your cleaner says he needs another week. And as for the lace, I told them we'd be back. Bugneux got his payment. There—that's everything, isn't it? So you owe me a hundred and eighty-five francs!"

Rosanette went over and took ten napoleons out of a drawer.[24] Neither of them had any change, and Frédéric offered to help.

"I'll pay you back," said Mademoiselle Vatnaz, slipping his fifteen francs into her bag. "But you're not a very nice man. I don't like you any more—you didn't ask me to dance even once the other day! Ah, my dear, I found a boutique on the Quai Voltaire with a frame made of stuffed hummingbirds, you'd just love it! If I were you, I'd go get it. But look—what do you think of this?"

She showed her an old piece of pink silk that she'd found in one of the Temple shops, to make into a medieval doublet for Delmar.

"He was here today, I assume?"

"No!"

"That's odd."

Then, a minute later: "Where are you going this evening?"

"To Alphonsine's," said Rosanette; this had to be at least the third version of what she planned to do that evening.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz continued: "And the Old Man of the Mountain? Any news?"[25]

The Marshal quickly gave her a wink, commanding her to say no more; and she escorted Frédéric to the foyer, to find out whether he was going to see Arnoux.

"Tell him to come here; but not in front of his wife, you understand?"

At the top of the stairs, an umbrella was leaned up against the wall, next to a pair of galoshes.

"Vatnaz's overshoes!" said Rosanette. "What a foot, eh? Big girl, my friend."

Then, adopting a melodramatic tone and rolling the r: "But she's not to be trrr-usted!"

Frédéric, emboldened by this little confidence, leaned over to kiss her on the neck. She said, coldly, "Why not? It doesn't cost anything!"

He exited the building feeling lighthearted, with no doubt that the Marshal would soon become his mistress. That desire gave birth to another; and despite the bitterness he still felt toward her, he felt like going to see Madame Arnoux.

Besides, he had to go there anyway, to deliver Rosanette's message.

But at this hour, he thought, as the bells rang out six o'clock, Arnoux is likely to be home.

He put off his visit till the next day.

She was sitting there in the same position as she had been the last time, mending a child's shirt. The little boy was at her feet, playing with a wooden menagerie of toys; Marthe, a little farther off, was writing.

He began by complimenting her on her children. She replied without any irritating maternal exaggeration.

The room was tranquility itself. Bright sunshine streamed in the window, making the corners of the furniture gleam, and since Madame Arnoux was sitting by the window, a great shaft of light fell on the curls at the nape of her neck, penetrating her amber skin and suffusing it with the color of liquid gold. Then Frédéric said, "Ah, now here's a young lady who's grown a great deal in three years! Do you remember, mademoiselle, when you fell asleep on my lap in the coach?" Marthe did not recall. "One evening when we were all coming back from Saint-Cloud?"

Madame Arnoux's expression was deeply sad. Was it to forbid him from alluding to any shared memory they had?

Her beautiful black eyes, the whites of which shone brilliantly, moved gently beneath the slight heaviness of her lids; within the depths of her pupils lived an infinite kindness. He was seized anew by a love that was stronger than ever, immense; contemplating her there dazed him, and he tried to shake the feeling off. How could he manage to impress her? What means could he use? And having wracked his brains, Frédéric could think of nothing better than money. He started to talk about the weather, which was not as cold as it was at Le Havre.

"You've been there?"

"Yes, for some family business . . . an inheritance."

"Oh, I'm happy to hear it!" she replied, seeming so genuinely pleased that he was touched, as if she had done him some great service. Then she asked what he was going to do with himself, as a man needs to work at something. He remembered his old lie, and said that he hoped to work for the Council of State, thanks to Monsieur Dambreuse, who was a député.

"Do you by chance know him?"

"Just by name." Then, in a lower voice: "The other night—*he* took you to that dance, didn't he?"

Frédéric said nothing.

"That's all I wanted to know. Thank you."

Then she asked him two or three discreet questions about his family and hometown. It had been very good of him, after having spent such a long time down there, not to have forgotten them.

"But . . . did you think I could?" he replied. "How could I possibly?"

Madame Arnoux got up. "I believe you feel an affection for us that is good and true. Now, farewell—till we meet again."

She held out her hand to him in a frank, masculine way. Surely this was a kind of pledge, a promise? Frédéric felt happy to be alive; he had to keep himself from singing; he felt he simply had to express what he was feeling, to do some good, generous deeds, to give alms. He looked around to see if there weren't someone he could help. No impoverished person presented himself; and his vague impulse of doing good evaporated, because he was not the sort of man who would go out of his way looking for any such opportunity.

Then he remembered his friends. The first he thought of was Hussonet, then Pellerin. Dussardier's lowly position naturally deserved his consideration; as for Cisy, he felt a burst of happiness at the thought of showing off his new wealth to him. He wrote to all

four, inviting them to a housewarming party the following Sunday, at eleven sharp, and he asked Deslauriers to bring Sénécal along.

The latter had been fired from his third teaching position, this time for having protested against the annual prize-giving ceremony, arguing that it was contrary to equality. He was working now for a machine manufacturer, and hadn't been living with Deslauriers for six months.

Their parting had not been painful. Sénécal had taken to inviting men in smocks to the apartment, all of them patriots, all of them laborers, all of them fine people, but the lawyer found their company tedious. Moreover, some of his friend's ideas, however excellent they might be in carrying on a war, were distasteful to him. He kept his mouth shut out of ambition, trying to manage Sénécal in hopes of someday controlling him, for he was impatiently awaiting the great social and political upheaval, in which he was confident he would find a niche for himself.

Sénécal's convictions were more disinterested. Every evening when he came home from work to his attic room, he searched through his books for material that would justify his dreams. He had annotated *The Social Contract.*[26] He greedily devoured *La Revue indépendante.*[27] He knew all of Mably, Morelly, Fourier, Saint-Simon, Comte, Louis Blanc,[28] the whole tedious wagonload of socialist writers, the ones who want to reduce humankind to the level of the barracks room, those who want to send it to the brothels for diversion, and those who want to keep us all bent down over the shop counter or the workbench; and out of a mishmash of all that, he had created for himself a kind of idealized, virtuous democracy, a kind of Americanized Sparta where the individual would only exist to serve society, a society more omnipotent, more absolute, infallible, and divine than those of the Grand Llamas or the Nebuchadnezzars. He had no doubt that this ideal was coming closer every day; and when he encountered anything that seemed at all hostile to it, he attacked with the logic of a mathematician—and the good faith of an Inquisitor. Aristocratic titles, crosses of the Legion of Honor, plumes, and liveries especially, and even any reputation a little too much applauded—these things scandalized him, for every day his studies and his own sufferings rekindled his profound hatred of every distinction, every superiority whatsoever.

"Why do I have to go and be courteous to that fine gentleman? If he wants to see me, he can come here."

Deslauriers managed to drag him along.

They found their friend lounging in his bedroom. Window blinds, double curtains, Venetian glass—nothing was lacking; Frédéric, in a velvet vest, was sprawled in a wing chair, smoking cigarettes of Turkish tobacco.

Sénécal's mood darkened, like a puritan finding himself at an orgy. Deslauriers took it all in at a glance; then, making a low bow: "My lord! My humble respects!"

Dussardier rushed to throw his arms around him: "So you're rich now? Ah, that's wonderful, dammit, just wonderful!"

Cisy came in, a crepe ribbon around his hat. Since the death of his grandmother, he'd been enjoying a considerable fortune, and he now was less inclined to seek out amusement than to find ways of distinguishing himself from others, of being different from everybody else, and of being "a little more high-toned." Those were his words.

But by now it was noon, and everybody was yawning; Frédéric was still waiting for someone. The name Arnoux being mentioned, Pellerin grimaced; he considered Arnoux a kind of apostate, now that he had abandoned the arts.

"What if we just forgot about him? What do you say?"

Everyone approved.

A servant in gaiters opened the door, revealing the dining room with its nearly waist-high oaken baseboards trimmed with gold and its two dressers loaded with tableware. Bottles of wine were warming on the stove; the blades of new knives gleamed next to the oysters; there was something sweet, something enthralling about the milky-white tint of the engraved glasses, and the table could barely be seen beneath the game, the fruits, the extraordinary dishes. All this was lost on Sénécal.

He began by asking for some plain bread (the coarser the better), and speaking of which, he proceeded to the murders at Buzançais and the food crisis.[29]

None of that would have happened if agriculture were managed better, if everything were not left open to competition, to anarchy, to that deplorable maxim of laissez-faire—don't interfere! This was just a new feudalism, a feudalism of capitalism, far worse than the old kind!

But watch out! Eventually, the people would get sick and tired of it, and just might repay the capitalists for all their suffering, whether by bloody evictions or by pillaging their grand houses.

Frédéric suddenly had a clear mental image of a torrent of men, all bare-armed, bursting into the great drawing room of Madame Dambreuse, smashing all the mirrors with their pikes.

Sénécal went on: the worker, because wages were so insufficient, was worse off than helots, Blacks, and pariahs, especially if he had children. "Will he be reduced to getting rid of them by suffocating them, as has recently been suggested by some English doctor, a follower of Malthus?"[30]

Then, turning to Cisy: "Must we all be reduced to following the counsels of the infamous Malthus?"

Cisy, who was quite unaware of either the infamy or indeed the existence of Malthus, replied that a lot was being done for the poor, and that the upper classes . . .

"Oh, the upper classes!" replied the socialist with a sneer. "In the first place, there's no such thing as an upper class—it's only the heart that raises a person up! And listen, we aren't looking for charity—no! Just equality, and a fair division of goods."

What he asked was that the worker should be able to become a capitalist, the same way a private can work up to being a colonel. The old guilds limited the number of apprentices, and that at least had the merit of ensuring that there wouldn't be a surplus of workers, and the old festival days and banners kept up a sense of fraternity.

Hussonet, as a poet, missed the banners; Pellerin too, a feeling he'd picked up in the Café Dagneux, listening to the phalansterians talk.[31] He declared that Fourier was a great man.

"Oh come on!" exclaimed Deslauriers. "He was an old fool! He saw divine vengeance as causing the fall of empires. He's just like that Saint-Simon and his church, with his hatred of the French Revolution—they're just a gang of clowns who want to bring Catholicism back again!"

Monsieur de Cisy, to clarify things no doubt, or perhaps to enhance their opinion of him, announced in a gentle tone: "So these two philosophers don't agree with Voltaire?"

"Voltaire? You can have him!" replied Sénécal.

"What? You see, I thought . . ."

"Certainly not! He had no love for the people!"

The conversation then turned to current affairs: Spanish marriages, the corruption at Rochefort, the new organization of the Saint-Denis cathedral chapter, which would bring on higher taxes.[32] But we were all paying plenty of taxes already, according to Sénécal.

"And good God, what for? To build a new cage for apes at the zoo, to have gaudy staff-officers parade around our squares, or to support feudal etiquette among the valets at the Tuileries!"

Cisy said, "I read in *La Mode* that at the Tuileries, at the ball on St. Ferdinand's day, everyone was dressed in high style."

"Isn't that pitiful!" said the socialist, shrugging his shoulders in disgust.

"And then there's the Versailles museum!" exclaimed Pellerin. "Let's talk about that! Those imbeciles have shortened a Delacroix and lengthened a Gros![33] And at the Louvre they've been doing so much restoring, scraping, and fiddling around with all the canvases that in ten years not a one of them will remain. And as for the mistakes in their catalog, some German has written a whole book on the subject. Foreigners, I tell you, they're laughing at us!"

"We're the joke of all Europe," said Sénécal.

"That's because Art is completely dependent on the Crown."

"As long as we don't have universal suffrage . . ."

"Excuse me!" the artist interrupted, because, having been refused by all the salons for the past twenty years, he was in a state of constant fury against the Powers. "I wish they'd just leave us in peace. I'm not asking for anything! But the Chambers really ought to pass some laws to support Art. They need to establish a chair in Aesthetics, and the holder of the chair, who needs to be both a practitioner and an academic, can try to unite people. Hussonet, you ought to put something about this in your paper."

"But are the papers truly free? For that matter, are we?" Deslauriers broke in, impassioned. "When you think that you need to fill out as many as twenty-eight forms just to put a small boat out on the river, it makes me wish I could go live with the cannibals! The government is swallowing us up! Everything's controlled by the government—law, the arts, the air you breathe—and France lies there, groaning, beaten down, under the policeman's boot and the priest's cassock!"

The future Mirabeau went on freely spilling his bile. Then he picked up his glass, stood up, and one hand on his hip, his eyes ablaze,

said: "I drink to the complete destruction of the existing order, that is, of everything called Privilege, Monopoly, Management, Hierarchy, Authority, State!" And then, his volume rising even higher: "I'd like to smash it all like this!" With that he threw the fine wine glass onto the table, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

Everybody clapped, Dussardier the most enthusiastically.

The sight of an injustice made him furious. He was worried about Barbès,[34] and he was the kind of man who'd throw himself under a carriage to help a fallen horse. His learning was limited to two books, one titled *The Crimes of Kings* and the other *Mysteries of the Vatican.* He had listened to the lawyer with delight, his mouth hanging open. Finally, unable to restrain himself: "The thing I blame Louis-Philippe for is he left the Poles in the lurch!"

"Now just a minute!" said Hussonet. "First of all, Poland doesn't exist; it was invented by Lafayette! Generally speaking, if you actually meet a Pole, you'll find they come from the Faubourg Saint-Marceau; all the real Poles were drowned, along with Poniatowski."[35] In short, he didn't believe in any of that anymore; he'd "got over all that." It was like the sea serpent, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and "that old one about Saint Bartholomew's Day!"[36]

Sénécal, without defending the Poles, picked up on the last words from the man of letters. People had been unfair to the Papacy, which, after all, was defending the people, and he called the League "the dawn of Democracy, a great egalitarian movement against the individualism of the Protestants."[37]

Frédéric was a little surprised at these ideas. They must have bored Cisy, because he turned the conversation to the *tableaux vivants* at the Gymnase, where they were drawing big crowds.

Sénécal was disgusted by these. Such spectacles corrupted the daughters of the proletariat by their audacious displays of luxury. And that is why he wholeheartedly approved of those Bavarian students who insulted Lola Montès.[38] Just like Rousseau, he saw more worth in a charcoal-burner's wife than a king's mistress.

"You're talking nonsense!" said Hussonet, majestically. He came to the defense of such women, using Rosanette as an example. He referred to her recent ball and to the costume that Arnoux had been wearing.

"Is it true that he's in trouble?" asked Pellerin.

The picture merchant had just been involved in a lawsuit regarding some land in Belleville, and he was currently involved with a kaolin company in lower Brittany, with a set of other fools like him.[39]

Dussardier knew more about him, because his boss, a Monsieur Moussinot, had talked with the banker Oscar Lefebvre about Arnoux, and the banker, having heard about some of the debts he had renewed, concluded that his financial position was shaky.

The dessert finished, they went into the drawing room, decorated, like that of the Marshal's, in yellow damask, in Louis XVI style.

Pellerin criticized Frédéric for not having chosen the neo-Grecian style instead; Sénécal struck matches on the hangings; Deslauriers refrained from making any observations. But he did make one in the library, calling it a little girl's library. The greater part of all the contemporary authors were on the shelves. It was impossible to speak about their works, because Hussonet immediately began telling anecdotes about their personal lives, criticizing their faces, the way they lived, their clothes, exalting the fifteenth-rate and denigrating the first-rate, all the while deploring—of course—the decadence of modern times. Some little village folk song had more poetry in it than all the lyrics of the nineteenth century; Balzac was overrated, Byron disgraced, Hugo didn't know the first thing about theater, etc.

"But why," Sénécal asked, "don't you have anything by our working-class poets?"

And Monsieur de Cisy, who was quite current on literary trends, was surprised not to see "any of the new physiologies, like the physiology of the smoker, the fisherman, the toll-collecter" on Frédéric's table.[40]

They were beginning to irritate him so much that he felt like throwing them all out. But I'm turning stupid, he thought. He took Dussardier aside and asked quietly if there were anything he could do for him.

The good young man was touched. But with his current position as cashier, he didn't need anything.

Then Frédéric led Deslauriers into his bedroom, and taking two thousand francs from his desk, he said, "Here, old friend; put this in your pocket! It's to settle the last of my debts to you."

"But . . . the newspaper?" asked the lawyer. "You know that I've told Hussonet about it."

And when Frédéric replied that he was "a little short right now," the other responded with a bitter smile.

After the liqueurs, they drank beer; after the beer, grog; the pipes were relit. Finally, at five in the afternoon, they all left; they walked off in a line, not speaking, until Dussardier said that Frédéric had been a perfect host. Everyone agreed.

Hussonet said he thought the dinner was a little heavy. Sénécal faulted the frivolous décor. It certainly lacked any "cachet."

Deslauriers said nothing, fingering the bills in his trouser pocket.

Frédéric remained at home, alone. He thought about his friends, and felt a great, dark chasm growing between him and them. He'd held out his hand to them, but they hadn't responded to his own frankness and openness.

He remembered what Pellerin and Dussardier had said about Arnoux. Was it made up, just some slander? And he imagined Madame Arnoux ruined, weeping, selling off her furniture. The image tormented him all night; the next day, he called on her.

Uncertain as to how and whether he ought to tell her what he knew, he asked her casually whether Arnoux still owned the land in Belleville.

"Yes, he still does."

"And now he's working with a kaolin company from Brittany, right?"

"That's right."

"His factory is doing well, I suppose?"

"Well . . . I suppose so."

He paused at this, and she said, "Have you heard something? You're frightening me."

He told her what he had heard about renewing the debts. She lowered her head and replied, "I feared as much."

In fact, Arnoux, hoping to pull off a profitable speculation, had refused to sell the land, and had had to borrow heavily against it; finding no one interested in buying it, he had thought to enhance its value by building the factory on it. By now, expenses exceeded revenue. She knew nothing more than that; he managed to elude all her questions, and kept on insisting that "everything was going just fine."

Frédéric tried to reassure her. It was probably just a passing rough spot. Anyway, if he learned anything more, he'd let her know.

"Oh, yes! You will, won't you?" she asked, joining her hands together in a charming gesture of supplication.

So: he could be useful to her. Here he was, entering into her existence, into her heart.

Arnoux came in.

"Ah! How nice of you to come and take me out to dinner!"

Frédéric was struck dumb.

Arnoux went on to speak of various trivial matters, and then informed his wife that he'd be back late, as he had to meet with Monsieur Oudry.

"At his place?"

"Yes, of course—at his place."

As they walked down the stairs together, Arnoux admitted that since the Marshal had found herself with a free evening, they were going to have a light dinner together at the Moulin Rouge; and always being in need of someone to confide in, he had Frédéric accompany him up to her door.

But instead of entering, he stepped back on the sidewalk, looking up at the third-floor windows. Suddenly, the curtains parted.

"Excellent! Old Oudry's gone. Good evening!"

So she was being kept by old Oudry? Now Frédéric didn't know what to think.

From that day on, Arnoux was friendlier than ever; he invited Frédéric to dine at his mistress's home, and soon Frédéric was a regular guest at both houses.

Rosanette's was for amusement. It was the place to go after the club or the show, the place for a glass of tea or a game of lotto; on Sunday, it was charades. Rosanette, wilder than the others, came up with the most hilarious ideas, like running around the room on all fours, or sticking a cotton nightcap on her head. She would watch passersby from her window, wearing a leather helmet; she smoked a long-stemmed Turkish pipe and did Tyrolean yodels. In the afternoons, with nothing better to do, she would cut little flowers out of a piece of chintz and then stick them up on her windows, daub rouge on her two little dogs, burn incense, or tell her own fortune. Utterly incapable of resisting an impulse, she would become impassioned over some knickknack she'd seen, and unable to sleep for it, would rush out to buy it—and then quickly exchange it for some other one; she would botch her dress material, lose her jewelry, throw her money around wildly, and be capable of selling the shirt off her back in order to get the right box seat at the theater. She would often ask Frédéric to explain some word she had read and then not listen to his reply, because she had already somersaulted to some new thought, all the

while continuing to toss off questions. After her spasms of hilarity would come fits of childish rage; or perhaps she would daydream, sitting on the floor in front of the fire, her head drooped and her arms around her knees, inert as a dormant reptile. With no concern for his presence, she would get dressed in front of him, slowly pulling on her silk stockings, splashing water on her face while arching her back like a shuddering naiad; and when her grin revealed her white teeth, her eyes sparkling, her beauty and her vitality would dazzle Frédéric and set his nerves trembling.

Almost always, he found Madame Arnoux teaching her toddler how to read, or standing behind the piano bench as Marthe practiced her scales; when she was doing some sewing, it was a great happiness to him to be able, from time to time, to pick up her scissors. All her movements had a majestic serenity; her small hands seemed made for distributing alms or wiping away tears; and her voice, which was low and soft by nature, could sometimes sound like a caress, or like a gentle breeze.

She was never very moved by literature, but her intelligence shone through in her charmingly simple, penetrating remarks. She loved traveling, the sound of the wind in the trees, and walking bareheaded in the rain. Frédéric felt an almost sensual pleasure in hearing such things, believing that he could hear in them the beginnings of her surrender.

Spending time with these two women was like having two different melodies in his life: the one was mad, wild, amusing, and the other serious, almost religious; and the two, playing within him at the same time, grew stronger every day, fusing bit by bit into one: for, if Madame Arnoux were simply to brush him with her finger, the image of the other would immediately surge up in a wave of desire, since his chances with her were far less remote; and in the company of Rosanette, when he happened to feel moved by something, he immediately returned to his one great love.

This confusion was in part due to the similarities between the two houses. One of the chests that he used to see in the Boulevard Montmartre home was now in Rosanette's dining room, and the other was in Madame Arnoux's drawing room. Both houses had the same tableware, and he came across the same velvet skullcap left on easy chairs in both houses; and then a great many little gifts—screens, decorative boxes, fans—came and went between the house of the

mistress and that of the wife, as Arnoux was never shy about taking back something he had given to the one and presenting it to the other.

The Marshal laughed with Frédéric at some of Arnoux's bad habits. One Sunday after dinner, she led Frédéric over behind the door to show him that Arnoux had a bag of cakes in his overcoat pocket, which he'd filched from her table, to take home to his little ones no doubt. Monsieur Arnoux pulled all sorts of tricks that were just this side of dishonesty. He regarded it as a duty to evade paying his taxes; he never paid for a seat at the theater, always bought a second-class ticket but moved up to first class, and he liked telling the excellent, funny story of how, when he went to the baths, he would toss a button rather than a ten-sou coin into the attendant's box, but none of this prevented the Marshal from loving him.

And yet, one day as she was speaking about him, "Ah! He annoys me—I've had enough. But so what—I'll find another!"

Frédéric thought that the "other" was already found, and his name was Monsieur Oudry.

"Well," said Rosanette, "and what of it?"

Then, her voice breaking with tears:

"I ask him for hardly anything, but he won't give even that to me, the beast! He doesn't want to! But when it comes to promises, ah, that's another thing altogether."

He had even promised her a quarter of the profits from those famous kaolin pits of his; but no profit ever showed its face, any more than the cashmere shawl he'd been dangling in front of her eyes for the last six months.

Frédéric immediately thought of making her a gift. Arnoux might think he'd meant it as a lesson, and get angry with him.

Still, he was a good man after all—even his wife said so. But so crazy! Instead of inviting everyone over to his place for dinner as he used to, he now took them out to restaurants. He bought perfectly useless things, like gold chains, clocks, household items. Madame Arnoux even showed Frédéric one day, out in the corridor, a whole inventory of kettles, foot warmers, and samovars. And one day she admitted to feeling uneasy: Arnoux had made her sign a bill, made out to Monsieur Dambreuse.

Meanwhile, Frédéric kept planning literary projects, as a kind of personal point of honor. He wanted to write a history of aesthetics, the result of conversations with Pellerin, and then produce

dramatizations of different periods of the French Revolution, this under the indirect influence of Deslauriers and Hussonet. As he worked, the face of one woman or the other would pass before him; he had to fight against the impulse to go visit her, but soon he gave in; he was always sadder when he came back from visiting Madame Arnoux.

One morning, while Frédéric was sitting before his fire and feeling melancholy, Deslauriers came in. Sénécal's revolutionary talk had made his boss nervous, and once again he was without resources.

"What do you want me to do about it?" asked Frédéric.

"Nothing! I know you don't have any money. But still you could help him find a job somewhere, maybe with Monsieur Dambreuse, or even Arnoux?"

And in fact Arnoux was in need of engineers in his factory. Frédéric had a flash of inspiration: Sénécal could keep him informed about the husband's absences, deliver letters for him, and help him in a thousand different ways. Men would always perform services like that for each other. Besides, he could find ways of making use of him without the other knowing about it. Fate had offered him an assistant; it was a good omen; he had to seize the chance; and then, affecting indifference, he replied that it might be doable, and he'd get to work on it.

He got to work on it right away. Arnoux was working as hard as he could with his factory. He was trying to reproduce the copper-red of the Chinese, but his colors burned off in the firing process. In order to avoid cracks in his faience, he mixed chalk in with his clay; but most of the pieces broke, the enamel designs on the unfired clay turned to bubbles, and his large plates warped; and attributing these problems to faulty equipment in his factory, he wanted to have other grinding mills made, along with other dryers. Frédéric recalled his talking about some of these issues; and he approached Arnoux by announcing that he'd found a very capable man, one who could help him achieve his famous red. Arnoux at first leaped to attention, but after listening, he replied that he didn't need anybody.

Frédéric praised the prodigious knowledge of Sénécal, who was at once an engineer, a chemist, and an accountant, being a first-rate mathematician.

The porcelain manufacturer consented to meet him.

The two of them squabbled over salary. Frédéric intervened, and by the end of the week he managed to get them to come to an agreement.

But the factory being located in Creil, Sénécal could not be of any help to Arnoux. This simple realization discouraged Frédéric as badly as if there had been some serious misfortune.

He considered that the more Arnoux was separated from his wife, the better his chances with her would be. So he began to take Rosanette's side on matters; he pointed out how badly he was behaving toward her, related her vague threats from the other day, and even brought up the cashmere, even letting it slip that she had accused him of miserliness.

The word stung Arnoux, who was beginning to feel somewhat uneasy anyway, and he delivered the cashmere to Rosanette but gave her a scolding for having spoken of it to Frédéric; when she pointed out that she'd reminded him of his promise over a hundred times, he claimed that he had been too busy and had simply forgotten.

The next day Frédéric came to her place. Though it was two o'clock in the afternoon, the Marshal was still in bed; and at her bedside was Delmar, stationed at a little table and finishing up a helping of foie gras. As soon as she saw Frédéric across the room, she cried out: "I got it! I got it!" And then, taking him by the ears, she kissed his forehead, thanking him over and over, using the familiar *tu* with him, even asking him to sit down beside her on the bed. Her pretty, amorous eyes sparkled, her moist lips smiled, her sleeveless chemise exposed her two rounded arms; and at times he could even feel, through the cambric, the firm contours of her body. Delmar rolled his eyes all through this.

"But really now, my dear! But really!"

It was the same on the following visits. When Frédéric came in, she would stand up on a cushion to be able to kiss him more easily, calling him a sweetheart, a dearie, putting a flower in his buttonhole, straightening his cravat; and all these little intimacies were doubled if Delmar happened to be there.

Was she making advances? Frédéric believed so. Certainly, if Arnoux had been in his place, he wouldn't have had any scruples about deceiving a friend! And he was perfectly entitled to be less than virtuous with Arnoux's mistress, since he'd always behaved so perfectly around his wife; he felt that he must—or rather wanted to make himself believe that he must—justify his astonishing spinelessness. But he also felt he was behaving stupidly with the Marshal, so he determined to attack her directly.

So, one afternoon while she was bending over in front of her chest of drawers, he came up to her and made a movement so eloquent, so utterly unambiguous, that she stood straight up, her face bright red. He began again; she burst into tears, saying that she had been through a lot and it was no reason for him to treat her with such contempt.

He tried again. Now she took another line, laughing at him. He thought it would be clever to respond in kind, and to exaggerate a little. But now he seemed too cheerful about the whole thing, and she couldn't believe he was sincere; moreover, their habit of friendship became an obstacle to expressing any serious feeling. Then one day, she said she would never accept the leavings of another woman.

"What other woman?"

"Oh, what other woman! Why don't you go see Madame Arnoux?"

And in fact Frédéric often spoke about her; Arnoux, for his part, showed a similar obsession; and so she had got sick and tired of hearing about that woman; her insinuation now was a kind of revenge.

Frédéric nursed a grudge against her for that remark.

And anyway, she had begun to irritate him. Sometimes, putting on the airs of a jaded woman of the world, she would speak mockingly of love, to the point where he would have liked to slap her. But then, fifteen minutes later, love was the only real thing in the world, and crossing her arms over her chest as if she were embracing someone, her eyes half closed, as if swooning in ecstasy, she would murmur: "Oh, it's good! It's so good!" It was impossible to know her—to know, for example, if she loved Arnoux, for she laughed at him but she also seemed jealous of him. It was the same with Vatnaz, whom she would call a bitch one day, and then the next say she was her best friend. Everything about her, even the way she wore her chignon, seemed to be hiding something inexpressible, something like a challenge: and he wanted her, especially for the pleasure of conquering and dominating her.

What to do? For sometimes she would show him out the door without ceremony, or would show her face between two doors and whisper: "I'm busy right now. See you tonight!" Or he would find her surrounded by a dozen people; and when they were alone together, there were so many interruptions that he began to wonder if there had been some kind of wager laid against him. He invited her to dinner; she always refused; once she did accept, but then she didn't show up.

A Machiavellian scheme began to form in his mind.

He had heard from Dussardier about Pellerin's criticisms of him, so he came up with the idea of having Pellerin paint a portrait of the Marshal, a life-size one that would demand many sittings; he would attend every one of them; the artist's notorious unreliability would give them many opportunities to be alone together. So he coaxed Rosanette into having her portrait painted, a gift she could give her dear Arnoux. She agreed, for she could picture herself in the place of honor at the Grand Salon, a crowd gathered around her, the papers all writing about her, which would "launch" her immediately.

As for Pellerin, he snatched up the commission at once. This could make him a great man, could be his masterpiece.

He rifled through his memory for all the great portraits by the masters that he knew, and he settled on a Titian, which he would set off with touches of Veronese. Thus he would execute the picture with no artificial shadows, and in a clear light that would bring out the flesh in a single tone and give a kind of gleam to the accessories.

"What if I were to put her," he thought, "in a pink silk gown with an oriental burnoose? But no—burnooses are outré! What if I dressed her in blue velvet against a gray background, made the colors very strong? Or I could give her a white lace collar, have her holding a black fan, and put her against a scarlet curtain?"

And trying out idea after idea like this, he found his conception of the picture growing and expanding every day, and he marveled at it.

He felt his heart flutter when Rosanette, accompanied by Frédéric, arrived at his studio for the first sitting. He posed her standing up, her elbows leaning on a pedestal, and then had her sit instead in an armchair, constantly walking up to her and then away from her, straightening a tiny fold in her gown; he gazed at her with his eyes half closed and sought Frédéric's opinion.

"No—no!" he cried. "I'm going back to the original idea! I'm going to dress you up like a Venetian!"

She would have a gown of poppy red with a jeweled belt, and her wide, ermine-lined sleeve would reveal her naked arm, which would be touching the balustrade of a staircase going up behind her. On her left, a great column would rise up to the top of the canvas, there to join a curved architecture. Below it, in the distance, just barely visible would be a grouping of orange trees, almost black, and behind them a

blue sky streaked with white clouds. On the carpeted balustrade there would be, on a silver platter, a bouquet of flowers, an amber rosary, a dagger, and a casket of aged ivory, slightly yellowed, from which golden sequins would be flowing; some of the sequins would have fallen on the floor here and there, forming a set of bright, gleaming patches, which would guide the eye toward the tip of her foot, for she would be posed on the second-to-last stairstep, in a natural stance, in full light.

He went to look for a crate he used for carrying pictures, and he placed it on the platform to represent the step; then, using a stool to represent the balustrade, he placed upon it, as accessories, his jacket, a shield, a box of sardines, a packet of feathers, a knife, and then, when he had tossed a dozen sous on the ground in front of her, he had her assume her pose.

"Now imagine that all these things are great luxuries, splendid gifts. The head a little to the right! Perfect! Now don't move! Isn't that majestic attitude perfect for your kind of beauty?"

She wore a tartan dress with a large muff, and she was trying hard not to laugh.

"As for the coiffure, we'll add a string of pearls; that always makes for a good effect with red hair."

The Marshal exclaimed that she didn't have red hair.

"Don't worry! The Red of painters is not the same as it is for the bourgeois."

He began sketching the larger outlines of the picture; and he was so preoccupied with the great Renaissance artists that he began to talk about them. For an hour, he daydreamed out loud about those magnificent existences, so filled with genius, of glory, of sumptuousness, with triumphal processions entering cities and gala affairs in torchlight, with half-nude women, beautiful as goddesses.

"You ought to have lived then. A woman of your caliber would have merited at least a prince!"

Rosanette found such compliments quite pleasant. They arranged the day for the next sitting; Frédéric agreed to provide the accessories.

The heat of the stove having left her a little dazed, they walked back along the Rue du Bac and came to the Pont Royal.

It was a fine day, the air sharp and splendid. The sun was beginning to set; some of the windows on the houses in the Cité shone in the

distance like golden plaques, while behind them, to the right, the towers of Notre-Dame were profiled in black against the blue sky, a soft, gray haze visible on the horizon. The wind picked up; Rosanette declaring that she was hungry, the two of them went into the Pâtisserie Anglaise.

Some young women with their children were eating, standing up at the marble counter, where plates of cakes were arrayed under glass. Rosanette wolfed down two cream tarts. The powdered sugar left little moustaches at the corners of her mouth. From time to time she would wipe it with the handkerchief she carried in her muff; and her face, under her green silk hood, looked like a blossoming rose, framed by its leaves.

They set off again on foot; on the Rue de la Paix, she stopped in front of a jeweler's to look at a bracelet; Frédéric wanted to buy it for her as a gift.

"No," she said; "hang onto your money."

The phrase hurt him.

"Oh, what's wrong with baby? Is he sad?"

When their conversation started back up again, he returned to his declarations of love.

"You know it's impossible!"

"But why?"

"Oh, because . . ."

They walked along, her arm in his, and the folds of her skirt brushed against his legs. Then he remembered one winter twilight when, on the same sidewalk, Madame Arnoux had walked beside him just like this; and the memory so absorbed him that he forgot all about Rosanette, and didn't give her another thought.

She gazed ahead vaguely, letting herself wander like a lazy child. It was the hour when people were coming back from their afternoon walks, and carriages began rolling past briskly on the dry pavement. Pellerin's flatteries no doubt returning to her mind, she emitted a sigh. "Ah, some people have it made! I was meant for a rich man—no doubt about it."

He replied, in a brutal tone: "Well, you have one!"—because Monsieur Oudry was said to be a triple millionaire.

She wanted nothing more than to get rid of him.

"What's stopping you?"

And he gave vent to some bitter jokes on the old, bewigged bourgeois, showing her that a relationship like that was beneath her, and that she really ought to break it off!

"Yes," said the Marshal, as if speaking to herself. "That's what I'll probably end up doing!"

Frédéric was beguiled by this self-sacrifice. She slowed her pace, and he thought she must be tiring. But she insisted on not taking a cab, and she dismissed him at her doorway, blowing him a kiss.

"What a shame! And to think there are some imbeciles who consider me rich!"

His mood grew somber when he arrived home.

Hussonet and Deslauriers were there, waiting for him.

The bohemian was sitting at the table drawing Turks' heads, while the lawyer, with his muddy boots, was dozing on the sofa.

"Well, finally! But what a mood you're in! Can you listen to what I have to say?"

The popularity of Deslauriers as a tutor was diminishing, because he heaped his students with theories that wouldn't help them in their exams. He had pleaded two or three cases and had lost them all, and each new disappointment threw him back more violently on his old dream: a newspaper where he'd be able to show what he could do, get some revenge, spew his bile and his ideas. Fortune and reputation would follow, of course. And it was with this hope in mind that he had snagged the bohemian, for Hussonet owned a paper.

At the moment he was printing it on pink paper. He invented absurd little stories, composed puzzles, and even tried to put on concerts, despite how unsuitable the venue was. A one-year subscription "entitled the subscriber to a seat in the orchestra section of one of the finest theaters in Paris; moreover, management would also furnish any information that a foreign visitor might desire, whether artistic or otherwise." But the printer was beginning to make threats, the rent hadn't been paid for three months, and one problem after another kept coming up; thus, Hussonet would have let *L'Art* die if it hadn't been for the lawyer's daily exhortations and pep talks. He had brought him along today to make his proposition sound more solid.

"We're here to talk about the paper," he said.

"Oh, you're still thinking about that!" replied Frédéric, in a distracted tone.

"Of course I'm still thinking about it!"

And he laid out the plan all over again. If they reported on the stock market, they'd enter into relations with financiers, and that way they'd get the hundred thousand francs in security money.[41] But for the paper to become a political organ, they would first need to amass a sizable clientele, and for that certain expenses were necessary, for paper, printing, an office—in short, fifteen thousand francs.

"I don't have any money," said Fréderic.

"And do you suppose we do?" asked Deslauriers, his arms folded.

The gesture seemed an insult to Frédéric, and he replied, "Well, is that my fault?"

"Oh, all right then! Some have logs in their fireplace, truffles on their tables, a library, a coach, all the comforts! But others have to shiver up in a garret, eat twenty-sou meals, work like slaves, and live mired in poverty! Is it their fault?"

He repeated "Is it their fault?" with a haughty, Ciceronian irony that sounded like it came straight from the law court. Frédéric tried to say something.

"Oh, but I understand, people have their . . . aristocratic . . . necessities, because, no doubt, somewhere there's a woman involved . . ."

"And so what if there is? I'm free, aren't I?"

"Sure—as free as can be!"

Then, after a pause, "It's so easy to make promises!"

"My God! I'm not going back on my promises."

The lawyer continued: "In school, people take vows—they'll be like the secret society in Balzac's *The Thirteen*.[42] But then, when they meet again as adults, it's 'Ah, nice to see you, now please be on your way!' Because the one who could help the other one out prefers to keep everything for himself."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes, you've never even introduced us to the Dambreuses!"

Frédéric looked at him; with his shabby jacket, his dirty spectacles, and his haggard face, the lawyer looked like such a boor that he couldn't repress a disdainful smile. Deslauriers saw it, and he reddened.

He had already picked up his hat and was ready to walk out. Hussonet, extremely uncomfortable, tried to soften him with a beseeching look on his face, and then, when Frédéric turned his back

on him: "Come on, old friend! Be our Maecenas![43] Give the arts some help!"

Frédéric, with an abrupt motion of resignation, took up a piece of paper, and having written a few lines on it, passed it over to him. The bohemian's face lit up. Then, passing it on to Deslauriers: "Apologize, my lord!"

Their friend had commanded his notary to give them fifteen thousand francs as soon as possible.

"Ah! That's the Frédéric I know!" said Deslauriers.

"Gentleman's word of honor," the bohemian added, "you're a fine one! We'll have to enroll you in the gallery of the great patrons!"

The lawyer added, "You won't lose a sou; this is an excellent investment."

"It damn well is!" cried Hussonet. "I'll stake my head on it."

He went on to say so many absurdities, to promise so many miracles (perhaps he actually believed in them), that Frédéric couldn't tell if he was making fun of the others or himself.

That evening, he received a letter from his mother.

She was surprised to see that he still hadn't been given a government ministry, she said teasingly. Then she wrote of her health, and told him that Monsieur Roque visited her frequently now. "Now that he's a widower, I don't see anything wrong with receiving him. Louise is maturing very well." She added in a postscript: "You haven't said anything about your splendid acquaintance, Monsieur Dambreuse; if I were you, I'd make use of him."

And why not? He had drifted away from his intellectual ambitions, and his fortune (he now understood) was inadequate; because, once his debts were paid and he gave the agreed-upon sum to his friends, his income would be reduced by four thousand francs at the least. Besides, he felt the need to make a change in his life, to find something he could get involved in. So the next day, while dining with Madame Arnoux, he said that his mother was nagging at him to choose some kind of profession.

"But I thought," she replied, "that Monsieur Dambreuse was going to help you get into the Council of State? That would suit you very well."

It was what she wanted, then. He obeyed.

The banker, just like the first time, was seated at his desk, and his gesture indicated that Frédéric should wait a few minutes, as a

gentleman with his back to the door was talking about some serious matters. It concerned coal, and a merger among various companies.

There were portraits of General Foy[44] and Louis-Philippe on either side of the mirror; filing cabinets stood along the wainscoting, reaching all the way to the ceiling, and there were six rush-bottomed chairs, Monsieur Dambreuse's business dealings not requiring anything finer; it was like those dark, somber kitchens where great feasts are prepared. Frédéric's gaze was particularly struck by two great safes in the corners, and he wondered how many millions they contained. The banker opened one, and when the iron-plated door swung open, he could see nothing inside but some blue paper notebooks.

Finally the individual turned and came closer, so that Frédéric could see him. It was old Oudry. The two bowed, both of them reddening, which seemed to surprise Monsieur Dambreuse. Other than that, he seemed perfectly friendly. Nothing would be easier than to recommend his young friend to the office of the Keeper of the Seals.[45] They would be only too pleased to have him; then he concluded his courtesies by inviting him to a dinner party a few days hence.

Frédéric was just getting up into a cab to go to the party when a note from the Marshal was handed to him. By the light of the lanterns, he read:

> *Dear one, I've taken your advice. I've just dumped my Osage.*[46]
> *As of tomorrow evening, I'm free! Tell me how brave I've been.*

Nothing more than that! But clearly, this was an invitation for him to fill the vacancy. He gave an exclamation, tucked the note into his pocket, and set off.

Two policemen on horseback were stationed in the street. A string of paper lanterns was lit up over the two gates; and domestics rushed about in the courtyard, crying out, trying to get the coaches to move over under the awning over the steps. Then, upon entering the vestibule, all the noise ceased.

Tall trees rose up at the base of the staircase; lamps with porcelain globes gave off an undulant light that made the walls look like white watered silk. Frédéric ascended the stairs quickly. An usher called out his name; Monsieur Dambreuse held out his hand; just then, Madame Dambreuse appeared.

She wore a mauve gown trimmed with lace, her curls and ringlets more abundant than usual, and not a single jewel.

She complained about how rarely he visited them, and managed a few commonplace remarks. The guests were arriving; their method of greeting was to twist their bodies to one side, or to bend themselves practically double, or simply to nod their heads; then a married couple, a family, arrived, and everyone moved into the already packed drawing room.

Below the chandelier, in the middle of the room, an enormous ottoman supported a flower stand from which the flowers, curving down like plumes, hung over the heads of the women sitting around it, while other women were sitting in the easy chairs that formed two straight lines, symmetrically interrupted by the great red-orange velvet window curtains and the tall doorways with gilded lintels.

The crowd of men standing in the middle of the floor, their hats in their hands, from a distance looked like a near-solid mass of black, broken only here and there by the little points of red that decorations made in boutonnieres, the whole effect being made more somber by the uniform white of cravats. Except for some young men whose beards were just growing in, all of them looked bored; a few dandies, with dour expressions, were rocking on their heels. Gray heads and wigs were numerous; a bald pate here and there reflected the light; and the faces, either very red or very pale, revealed in their wrinkles an immense fatigue—the men there being mostly either in politics or in business. Monsieur Dambreuse had also invited several scholars, some judges, and two or three celebrated physicians, and he kept modestly refusing the compliments people paid him on his party, and their allusions to his wealth.

A multitude of servants, all wearing gold braid, were bustling about. The huge candelabra, like bouquets of fire, spilled their light against the wall hangings; they multiplied in the mirrors; and far at the back of the dining room, which was ornamented with a jasmine-covered lattice, the buffet looked like the great altar in a cathedral, or a jeweler's window showcase, so heaped was it with dishes, lids, tableware, in silver and silver-gilt, amid the sparkling of cut glass, light from which shimmered over the food. The three other drawing rooms were stuffed with works of art: landscapes by masters on the walls, ivories and porcelains on the tables, Chinese knickknacks on the

consoles; lacquer screens stood in front of the windows, clumps of camellias rose up in the fireplaces, and soft music hummed somewhere in the background, like the buzzing of bees.

Only a few were dancing, and judging from the listless way they dragged their feet, the dancers appeared to be performing a tiresome duty. Frédéric overheard snatches of conversations.

"Were you at the last charity ball at the Hôtel Lambert, mademoiselle?"

"No, monsieur!"

"It's going to be getting a lot hotter soon."

"I know—it'll be stifling!"

"Who composed this polka?"

"Good God, how would I know, madame?"

And behind him he could hear three old fools, standing in a window recess, whispering smutty remarks to each other; others were talking about railroads and free trade[47]; a sportsman was narrating his recent hunt; a Legitimist was arguing with an Orléanist.[48]

Wandering from group to group, he walked into the card room, where he recognized, standing in a circle of serious-looking men, Martinon, "now working in the Public Prosecutor's office in the capitol."

His fat face, the color of wax, fitted comfortably in the contours of his beard, which was a marvel, so precisely were the black hairs trimmed; and always eager to seek the perfect balance between the elegance his age required and the dignity his profession demanded, he kept one thumb hooked into an armpit (the style of the young and fashionable) and one arm thrust into his waistcoat (the style of the *doctrinaires*).[49] And even though he wore polished patent-leather boots, he had his temples shaved, to give himself the look of a thinker.

After coolly reeling off a few words to Frédéric, he turned back to his little council. A landowner was saying, "Those are the kinds of men who want to overturn society altogether!"

"They want to organize labor!" exclaimed another. "Can you imagine?"

"What do you expect!" a third burst in. "When we see Monsieur de Genoude hand in hand with the *Siècle*!"[50]

"And the conservatives calling themselves progressives! And where are they leading us, I ask you? To a Republic! As if such a thing were even possible in France!"

Everyone declared that, indeed, a Republic was impossible in France.

"But the thing that really matters," one gentleman observed at high volume, "is that there's too much talk about the Revolution—nowadays publishers are putting out an endless heap of histories, of books about it!"

"Not to mention," said Martinon, "that there just might be more serious subjects worth writing about!"

A man from the Ministry was worked up about the scandals of the theater: "Take, for example, this new drama *La Reine Margot*—it really goes too far![51] Is there really some reason we need to be talking about the Valois? All this puts royalty in a bad light! It's just the same with the Press. The September laws, if you ask me, are far too lenient![52] I'd like to see a court martial handle these journalists, and gag them once and for all! Drag them off, at the least insolence, to a military tribunal! And that would do the trick!"

"Oh, don't go too far, monsieur—don't go too far!" said a professor. "Don't attack the precious liberties we gained in 1830." Instead, decentralization ought to be considered and surplus Paris population spread out around the countryside.

"But the country towns are contaminated!" cried a Catholic. "The first thing to be done is to strengthen Religion!"

Martinon hastened to add: "Religion is certainly a curb on things."

All the evils sprung from the modern mania for rising up out of one's class, the desire for luxuries.

"On the other hand," said an industrialist, "luxuries are good for business. That's why I fully support the Duc de Nemours, when he required that knee breeches be worn at his soirees."

"Monsieur Thiers attended wearing trousers. You've heard what he said about it?"[53]

"Yes, charming! But the man is turning into a demagogue, and that speech of his about the separation of powers had a lot to do with the events of May twelfth."[54]

"Oh, not at all!"

"Well! Ahem!"

The circle was forced to separate, as a servant carrying a large platter was trying to get through and into the card room.

Under the green-shaded candles, rows of cards and coins were laid across the tables. Frédéric stopped in front of one of them, promptly lost the fifteen napoleons that he'd had in his pocket, and when he turned he found himself in the doorway of the boudoir where Madame Dambreuse was.

The room was packed with women sitting side by side on backless chairs. Their long skirts, billowing out around them, looked like waves from which their waists emerged, and their breasts offered themselves to the gaze from low-cut bodices. Nearly all of them clutched a bunch of violets in one hand. Their gloves, in drab colors, brought out the vivid whiteness of their arms; fringes and flowers dangled from their shoulders, and there were times when you might have thought that if one of them were to shiver in just the right way, her dress would fall off. But the decent respectability of their faces tempered whatever provocations their clothes might have been making; indeed, many of them had an almost animal placidity, so that this assemblage of half-nude women suggested nothing so much as the interior of a harem; a somewhat grosser comparison crossed the young man's mind. And every sort of beauty was present there: English girls with keepsake profiles, an Italian whose dark eyes smoldered like Vesuvius, three sisters from Normandy all dressed in blue and fresh as apple trees in April, a tall redhead wearing an amethyst necklace—and the bright white gleams of the diamonds atremble in the sprays on their hair, the spots of light given off by the gems on their bosoms, and the soft glow of the pearls framing their faces all mingled with the glitter of gold rings, with lace, with powder, with plumes, with the vermilion of delicate little mouths, with mother-of-pearl teeth. The ceiling, domed like a cupola, made the boudoir seem like a basket of flowers; and a perfumed breeze wafted continually from the fluttering of fans.

Frédéric, stationing himself behind them with his monocle in his eye, did not judge all the shoulders to be irreproachable; he thought about the Marshal, and that gave him control over his temptations, or rather consoled him for them.

But he did look at Madame Dambreuse, and he thought she was charming, even though her mouth was too long and her nostrils too wide. But she had her own unique grace. Her ringlets somehow

suggested a passionate languor, and her forehead, the color of agate, looked as if behind it lay a powerful mind, a commanding one.

She had seated her husband's niece, an ugly enough creature, beside her. From time to time she would interrupt herself to welcome newcomers; and as the murmur of feminine voices began to swell, the effect was like the chirruping of birds.

The talk concerned the Tunisian ambassadors and their costumes. One lady had attended the most recent reception at the Academie Française; another was talking about Molière's *Dom Juan,* recently staged at the Français.[55] At this, Madame Dambreuse caught the eye of her young niece and put a finger to her lips, but at the same time she could not repress a smile, which undercut the admonition.

Suddenly, Martinon appeared, standing in the doorway just opposite. She stood up. He offered her his arm. Frédéric, in order to keep on watching what further gallantries might be displayed, followed the two of them, threading his way through the card tables and catching up with them in the great drawing room; Madame Dambreuse quickly turned from her cavalier and struck up a friendly conversation with him.

She understood that he neither danced nor played cards. "Oh, people are sad when they're young!"

And then, sweeping her eyes across the ballroom: "Not that all this is so much fun, after all—at least for certain people."

And she turned, stopping in front of the row of armchairs, saying a kindly word here and there, while some old men with spectacles came up to pay court to her. She introduced Frédéric to a few of them. Monsieur Dambreuse touched him gently on the elbow and led him outside, onto the terrace.

He had spoken with the Minister. The business wasn't easy. Before being hired by the Council of State, one had to take an examination; Frédéric, suddenly filled with an inexplicable confidence, replied that he knew the necessary material.

The financier was not surprised, after all the praise that Monsieur Roque had heaped upon him.

At that name, Frédéric pictured little Louise, his house, his bedroom; and he remembered nights like this one, when he would have stayed sitting at his window, listening to the sound of the wagons

rolling by. And that memory of old sorrows brought Madame Arnoux back to his mind; he said nothing more, walking up and down the terrace. The windows formed tall red planes in the darkness; the sounds of the ball diminished; coaches were beginning to leave.

"Tell me why," Monsieur Dambreuse continued, "you're so set on the Council of State?"

He continued, in the tone of a man who had had plenty of experience, declaring that public office was a dead end, for he knew a bit about that; business was the better path. Frédéric objected that business was hard to learn.

"Oh, not at all! I could teach you what you need to know in no time."

Was he about to offer Frédéric a position in one of his industries?

The young man pictured, as if in a flash of lightning, the huge fortune that was coming to him.

"Let's go back in," the banker said. "You'll have dinner with us, won't you?"

It was three o'clock; people were leaving. In the dining room, a table was set for an intimate dinner.

Monsieur Dambreuse saw Martinon, and stepping close to his wife, he whispered: "Did you invite him?"

Her reply was dry: "Yes, of course."

The niece was not there. They drank well, they laughed loudly; and a few edgy jokes shocked nobody, since they all were feeling that relaxation which follows a slightly too-long period of restraint. Martinon was the only one who stayed serious; he refused to drink champagne, thinking that was the correct thing to do, but otherwise he was amiable enough and polite, for after Monsieur Dambreuse, who was narrow-chested, complained of shortness of breath, he asked several times about his health; then he turned his bluish eyes in the direction of Madame Dambreuse.

She questioned Frédéric as to which of the girls at the party he liked most. He hadn't really noticed any, and in any case he preferred women of around thirty.

"That may not be such a bad idea!" she replied.

Then, while they were putting on their cloaks and overcoats, Monsieur Dambreuse said to him: "Come by and see me one of these mornings; we'll talk."

Martinon, at the foot of the stairs, lit a cigar; and as he sucked away at it, he displayed so stupid a profile that his companion could not keep from saying: "Good Lord, you've got an enormous head!"

"It's turned a few in its day!" replied the young magistrate in a tone that was equal parts assurance and annoyance.

As Frédéric lay in bed, he went back over the evening. To begin with, his look (and he had observed himself in the mirrors multiple times), from the cut of his suit to the laces on his shoes, had been irreproachable; he had spoken to powerful men and had seen wealthy women from close up; Monsieur Dambreuse had treated him well, and Madame Dambreuse was almost inviting. He weighed, one by one, every comment she had made, even the slightest, as well as her gaze, and a thousand intangible but nonetheless expressive things. Wouldn't it be fine, wildly fine, to have a mistress like that! And after all, why not? He was just as good as somebody else! Maybe she wouldn't be so hard to conquer? Martinon came back to his mind; and as he fell asleep, he smiled with pity for the poor boy.

The thought of the Marshal woke him up; the words she'd used in that note—"as of tomorrow evening"—clearly implied she was suggesting a rendezvous for that day. He waited until nine, and then hurried over to her place.

Someone ahead of him on the stairs closed the door. He rang the bell; Delphine opened the door, declaring that madame was not at home.

Frédéric insisted, begged. He had something terribly serious to tell her, and he only needed a moment or two. Finally the argument of a hundred-sou coin was persuasive, and the maid let him into the antechamber.

Rosanette appeared. She was in her nightdress, her hair down; and from a distance she shook her head at him, making a gesture with her arms to indicate that she couldn't see him.

Frédéric descended the stairs slowly. This whim of hers was too much. He couldn't understand it at all.

At the concierge's lodge, Mademoiselle Vatnaz stopped him.

"Did she let you in?"

"No!"

"They showed you the door?"

"How did you know?"

"It's clear enough! But come on with me! Let's get out of here. I'm furious!"

She brought him out into the street. She was breathing heavily, and he could feel her thin arm trembling in his. Suddenly she spat out: "Oh! That vile . . ."

"Who? Who is it?"

"But it's him of course! Him! Delmar!"

The revelation crushed Frédéric; he asked, "Are you sure?"

"Listen, I followed him here!" cried Vatnaz. "I watched him go in! Do you understand now? But it's only what I deserve; I'm the one, stupid me, who introduced him to her. And if you only knew, my God! How I've taken him in, fed him, dressed him—and then all those schemes to get him into the papers! I loved him like a mother!" Then, with a bitter laugh: "Ah, but you see monsieur simply had to have velvet robes! An investment, he said, if you can believe that! And her! To think that I knew her when she was sewing underwear for a living! Without me, she would have tumbled into the gutter twenty times over! Oh, but I'll see that she gets there yet! Oh yes! I hope she drops dead in the workhouse! Then everybody will know!"

And then, like a torrent of gutter water carrying all the garbage along with it, her rage spilled out and drenched Frédéric with all the shameful deeds of her rival.

"She's slept with Jumillac, with Flacourt, with that little Allard, with Bertinaux, with Saint-Valèry, the one with the pockmarks—no, it was the other one! They're brothers—it doesn't matter! And when she found herself in trouble, I took care of everything. And what did I get out of it? She's so greedy! And then, you've got to admit that it was really very nice of me even to associate with her, because after all we're not exactly of the same class! Am I a whore? Do I sell myself? Not to mention that she's stupid as a cabbage. She spells 'category' with a 'th'! But then, the two of them are a perfect match, the way he thinks he's an artist and a genius. But my God, if he had any intelligence at all, he wouldn't stoop to something like this! You don't dump a superior woman for a tramp! You have to laugh at him. He's getting ugly. I loathe him! If I ran into him, I'd spit right in his face"—and with that she spat—"because that's what I think of him now! And then Arnoux,

eh? Isn't that abominable? He's forgiven her so many times! You can't imagine the sacrifices he's made. She ought to get down and kiss his feet! He's so generous, so good!"

Frédéric enjoyed hearing Delmar denigrated. He had accepted Arnoux. But this new pefidy of Rosanette's seemed to him something abnormal and deeply wrong; and, carried away by the old maid's powerful emotions, he found himself feeling affection for him. Suddenly he saw they were at Arnoux's door; Mademoiselle Vatnaz had led him, without his noticing it, down into the Faubourg Poissonnière.

"Here we are," she said. "I can't go in. But you can, right? There's nothing stopping you."

"Go in—to do what?"

"To tell him everything, for heaven's sake!"

As if he had been startled awake, Frédéric suddenly realized the despicable errand he was being pushed into.

"Well?" she asked.

He raised his eyes to the third floor. Madame Arnoux's lamp was burning. There was nothing, in fact, stopping him.

"I'll wait here. You go on up!"

Being commanded like that cooled him at once, and he said: "I'll stay there for quite a while. You'd do better to go on home. I'll come to your place tomorrow."

"No, no!" said Vatnaz, stamping her foot. "Get him and take him with you! Bring him over there! Surprise the two of them in the act!"

"But Delmar won't still be there."

She lowered her head. "Yes—I suppose that might be true."

She stood in the middle of the street, without speaking, carriages passing them by; then, fixing her eyes, eyes like those of a wildcat, on him: "I can count on you, can't I? You and I have a sacred bond now! Do it. Till tomorrow!"

Frédéric went in, and walking down the corridor, could hear two voices arguing.

He heard Madame Arnoux saying, "Don't lie! Don't lie!"

He entered the apartment. They fell silent.

Arnoux was pacing back and forth, and madame was sitting in a little chair by the fire, extremely pale, her gaze fixed. Frédéric turned as if to leave. Arnoux seized him by the hand, relieved that help had arrived.

"But I'm afraid that I . . ." said Frédéric.

"Stay, stay!" Arnoux whispered in his ear. Madame continued, "You must forgive us, Monsieur Moreau! These are the kinds of things you meet with from time to time with couples."

"But that's only because somebody puts them there," Arnoux said, cheerily. "Women have their little whims! That one over there, for instance, isn't a bad woman. No, on the contrary! No, she's been entertaining me for the last hour with a whole heap of made-up stories."

"They are true!" exclaimed Madame Arnoux impatiently. "Because the fact is you did buy it!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! At the Persian's."

Ah—the cashmere shawl, thought Frédéric.

He felt guilty, and afraid.

She added, "Just last month, on a Saturday, the fourteenth."

"Oh, on that day I happened to be in Creil! So, you see."

"No, not at all. Because we dined on the fourteenth at the Bertins'."

"The fourteenth . . . ?" said Arnoux, raising his eyes as if trying to find the date.

"The clerk you bought it from was a blond!"

"As if I remember every sales clerk I deal with!"

"Still, he wrote the address, which you dictated to him: 18 Rue de Laval."

"How do you know that?" asked Arnoux, startled.

She shrugged. "Oh, it's simple enough: I had gone there to have my cashmere shawl mended, and one of the managers told me that they had just sent another one of them to the home of Madame Arnoux."

"Is it my fault if there's another Madame Arnoux living on the same street?"

"No. But it was sent to Jacques Arnoux," she replied.

Then he tried to change the subject, protesting his innocence. It was a mistake, just a coincidence, one of those things that happen that you can't explain. You can't go around condemning people on the basis of mere suspicion, or shaky evidence; look, for example, at the case of the unfortunate Lesurques.[56] "So, again, I'm telling you that you're wrong! Do you want me to swear on my word of honor?"

"It isn't worth the trouble."

"Why?"

She looked him straight in the face without saying a word; then she stretched out her arm, took up the silver casket from the mantelpiece, and held out an opened bill.

Arnoux's whole face went a deep red, and his agitated features swelled up.

"Do you have anything to say?"

"But . . ." he said slowly, "what—what does that prove?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, her voice expressing both pain and irony. "Oh!"

Arnoux kept turning the bill in his hands over and back again, staring at it fixedly, as if he were trying to find the answer to some great problem contained in it.

"Oh, yes! Yes, now I remember!" he said at last. "It was a request from somebody else. You must recall it, don't you, Frédéric?" Frédéric said nothing. "An errand I was doing for somebody . . . for . . . for old Oudry."

"And who was it for?"

"His mistress."

"You mean your mistress!" cried Madame Arnoux, standing up.

"I swear to you . . ."

"Don't start again! I know everything now!"

"Well, fine then—so now you're spying on me!"

She replied coldly, "And does that hurt your delicate feelings?"

"When some people get wound up," Arnoux replied, looking around for his hat, "there's no way to reason with them!" Then, after heaving a great sigh: "My poor friend—never get married! Trust me on that!" And he left, saying he needed fresh air.

There was a long silence; and everything in the apartment seemed utterly still, motionless. The ceiling above the Carcel lamp[57] glowed in a luminous circle, while in the corners of the room the darkness was deepening, like layer upon layer of black gauze; the only sounds were the ticking of the clock and the crackling of the fire.

Madame Arnoux had sat back down, on the other side of the fireplace, in the easy chair. She was biting her lips and shivering; her hands rose to her face, a sob escaped; she was crying.

Frédéric sat in the little chair, and in a gentle, soothing voice, the kind one uses speaking to the sick: "You surely know that I care . . . ?"

She didn't respond.

But then, speaking her thoughts aloud: "I leave him perfectly free! There's no need for him to lie!"

"That's true," said Frédéric. It was probably just a matter of habit, he'd probably not thought about it at all, and maybe, if it were a matter of real importance . . .

"What would you call more important than this?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Frédéric lowered his head, with an obedient smile. Arnoux, still, possessed some very good qualities: he loved his children.

"Yes, and he's doing everything he can to ruin them!"

But that was because he had such an easy-going nature; because after all, he was a decent sort.

She exclaimed: "But what does that mean anyway, a 'decent sort'?"

He continued making defenses for Arnoux, the vaguest kind he could think of, and while he felt sorry for her, inwardly he was rejoicing; his heart was glad. Out of revenge, or perhaps out of affection, she would look to him for consolation. His hopes, suddenly swelling up to new heights, strengthened his love for her. Never had she seemed so captivating, so profoundly beautiful. From time to time she took a deep breath, and it lifted her breasts; her eyes, staring straight ahead, seemed dilated, as if by some interior vision, and her lips were half open, as if to give her soul passage. At times, she pressed her handkerchief firmly to her lips; he wished he could be that little swatch of material, all damp with tears. Despite himself, he looked over at the bed in the alcove, imagining her head on the pillow; and he could picture it so vividly that he had to restrain himself from taking her in his arms. When she closed her eyes—calmer now, motionless—he leaned closer and, greedily examined every inch of her face. Then boots could be heard out in the corridor; it was the other one. They listened to him close the door to his bedroom. Frédéric's gesture asked Madame Arnoux whether he ought to be leaving.

Her answering gesture signified "yes"; and that mute exchange of their thoughts was like a consent, the first step into adultery.

Arnoux, getting ready for bed, was taking off his frock coat. "Well, how's she doing?"

"Oh, she's fine!" said Frédéric. "This will blow over."

But Arnoux was concerned. "You don't know her! She has these nervous attacks. . . . That damnable sales clerk! This is what it is to be too good at your job! If I hadn't given that damned shawl to Rosanette!"

"Oh, you shouldn't regret that. You can't imagine how grateful she is!"

"You think so?"

Frédéric was sure of it. The proof was that she'd just broken it off with old Oudry.

"Oh, the poor little thing!"

And in the excess of his emotion, Arnoux wanted to rush over to her now.

"No need for that! I just came from there. She's not feeling well."

"All the more reason!"

Quickly, he put his frock coat back on and picked up his candle. Frédéric, inwardly cursing himself for his stupidity, began to argue that Arnoux out of decency ought to stay home with his wife. He couldn't abandon her now; that would be a terrible thing to do. "Honestly, you'd be doing a great wrong. There's nothing urgent over there! You can go over tomorrow! Come on—do this for me."

Arnoux put the candle back and embraced Frédéric, saying, "You're a good man, you are!"

III

That was the beginning of a miserable existence for Frédéric. He became the house parasite.

If anyone wasn't feeling well, he went over three times a day for the latest news; he would go see the piano tuner, he would invent a thousand little errands he could do for them; and he managed to appear delighted while he endured the sulks of Mademoiselle Marthe and the caresses of little Eugène, who was forever running his sticky hands over Frédéric's face. He ate dinners at which monsieur and madame, sitting across the table from each other, didn't exchange a single word, or during which Arnoux would infuriate his wife with his silly remarks. After the meal, he would go into the bedroom and play with their son, hiding behind furniture or carrying him up on his back, lumbering along on all fours like Henri IV.[58] Finally, he would go

out, and she would launch right into her eternal subject of complaint: Arnoux.

It wasn't his behavior that bothered her but her wounded pride, and she didn't hide her repugnance for this man who, she said, was entirely without delicacy, dignity, or honor.

"Or maybe he's just crazy!" she would say.

Skillfully, Frédéric led her to put her confidence in him. Before long, he knew her whole life story.

Her parents were from the lower middle class in Chartres. One day when Arnoux was out doing sketches by the river (he thought of himself as an artist in those days), he had caught sight of her coming out of church and promptly asked to marry her; because he had money, there had been no objection. Anyway, he had been madly in love with her. She added, "For that matter, he still loves me, after his fashion!"

They'd spent their first months in Italy.

Arnoux, despite his enthusiasm for landscapes and masterpieces, had done nothing but complain about the wine and organize picnics with English tourists for amusement. Then a few paintings shrewdly resold had started his career as an art dealer. Then he'd got mixed up with manufacturing faience. Now other kinds of speculations were tempting him; and becoming more vulgar day by day, he had picked up gross and expensive habits. She reproached him less for his vices than for his whole way of living. No improvement was likely to be coming, and her own unhappiness was irreparable.

Frédéric declared that his own life was a failure too.

But he was still so young! Why should he give up? And she went on to give him good advice: "Work! Get married!" He responded with a bitter smile; because he could not express the real reason for his discontent, he had to come up with another one, something more sublime another, and he tried to come off like an accursed Antony.[59] Anyway, that sort of rhetoric did to some extent apply to his situation.

Action, for certain men, becomes more impossible the stronger their desire. Their mistrust of themselves hamstrings them; the fear of displeasing frightens them; and anyway, our deepest feelings are like virtuous women: they dread being seen, and they go through life with lowered eyes.

While he had come to know Madame Arnoux much better—and perhaps, in fact, because of that—he was even more timid than

before. Every morning he got up and vowed to be bolder. But an invincible modesty kept him from keeping the vow; and he couldn't let himself be guided by any example because she was different from all other women. Through the power of his dreams and fantasies, he had raised her up to a superhuman level. When he was next to her, he felt like the most insignificant object on earth, less significant than those little scraps of silk that fell from her scissors.

And then he would fantasize about absurd things—an ambush, night, drugs, skeleton keys—because anything seemed better than having to brave her disdain.

Moreover, the children, the two maids, even how the furniture pieces were placed, all posed insurmountable obstacles. So he resolved to have her for himself alone, to go off and live alone with her somewhere far away; he wondered which lake would be blue enough, which beach would be sweet enough, whether it ought to be Spain, Switzerland, or the Orient. Always choosing the days on which she seemed most irritated, he would tell her that she simply had to get out of there, to find some way ahead for them, and the only way he could see was by a separation. But her love for her children would never allow her to take such an extreme option, a virtuous stance that only served to increase his respect.

He passed his afternoons recalling the previous evening's visit and looking forward to the upcoming one. When he didn't dine with them, he would go out about nine o'clock and stand on the corner of their street; and as soon as Arnoux had closed the outer door and left, he would bound up the two flights of stairs and ask the maid, with an innocent air: "Is monsieur at home?"

And then he would pretend to be surprised at his absence.

Often, Arnoux returned home unexpectedly. Then he would have to go off with him to a little café on the Rue Sainte-Anne, where Regimbart was a regular.

The Citizen would begin by articulating some new complaint against the Crown. Then they would talk, trading friendly insults; because the manufacturer considered Regimbart a deep thinker, and hating to see such talent go to waste, he would tease him about his laziness. The Citizen thought Arnoux was a man of spirit and imagination, but he deplored his immorality; thus he treated him without the

least indulgence and even refused to have dinner at his place, because he "couldn't stand formality."

Sometimes when they were just about to depart, Arnoux would have an attack of hunger. He "simply had" to have an omelet or some baked apples; and those particular items not being available in the café, he would send out for them. They waited. Regimbart stayed on, and in the end he would agree, in his cranky way, to have a little something.

But his mood was always dark, as he sat for hours before the same half-empty glass. Since Providence was not managing things the way he thought they should be managed, he was turning into a hypochondriac, he did not even want to read the papers anymore, and he exploded angrily at the slightest mention of England. Once, when a waiter had served him clumsily, he cried out: "Haven't we had enough insults from foreigners!"

Apart from such crisis moments, he sat there moodily, meditating "some infallible plan to blow the whole damn thing to bits."

While he remained lost in his own thoughts, Arnoux in a monotonous voice, a somewhat drunken look in his eyes, would tell not-quite-credible anecdotes in which he always came out ahead, thanks to his cleverness; and Frédéric—probably because of some deep resemblance between the two of them—felt drawn to the man. He reproached himself for this weakness, believing that, on the contrary, he really ought to hate him.

Arnoux complained to him about his wife's moods, her stubbornness, her unfair prejudices. She didn't use to be like that.

"If I were you," said Frédéric, "I'd give her an allowance and go live on my own."

Arnoux didn't say anything; then, after a pause, he started praising her to the skies. She was so good, devoted, intelligent, virtuous; turning to her physical qualities, he went on to share one revelation after another, like those travelers who display their valuables in an inn.

Then a crisis threw him off balance.

He had joined a kaolin company as a member of the board of trustees. But never questioning anything he was told, he had signed off on inaccurate reports and approved, without verification, fraudulent annual inventories that had been drawn up by the manager. Now the company had collapsed, and Arnoux, legally liable, had just been

sentenced, along with the other trustees, to pay damages that would cost him somewhere around thirty thousand francs, an amount based on the aggravating circumstances of the case.

Frédéric read about it in a newspaper, and he hurried over to the Rue de Paradis.

He was received in madame's room. It was their breakfast time. Bowls of café au lait sat upon a small table by the fireside. Slippers lay scattered on the carpet, and clothes on the armchairs. Arnoux was in his underpants and a knitted waistcoat, his eyes red, his hair disheveled; little Eugène was crying because of his mumps, though he continued to nibble on his bread and butter; his sister was eating peacefully; Madame Arnoux, a little paler than usual, was waiting on all three.

"So," said Arnoux, emitting a great sigh, "you know about it!" And when Frédéric made a gesture of sympathy: "There you have it! I'm a victim because I'm too trusting!"

He said nothing more; and his depressed feelings were so strong that he pushed his plate away. Madame Arnoux raised her eyes and shrugged her shoulders. He rubbed his forehead with his hands. "But, after all, I'm not guilty! I have nothing to reproach myself with. It's just bad luck! We'll find a way out of it! Ah, never mind!"

And responding to his wife's pleas, he took a bite of brioche.

That evening Arnoux wanted to dine alone with her in a particular private room in the Maison d'Or. Madame Arnoux didn't understand this caprice, and even took offense at being treated like a mistress—though for Arnoux himself, on the contrary, the gesture was a mark of affection. Now, feeling bored, he went off to the Marshal's for some amusement.

Up until now, people had forgiven him for a multitude of things because of his good nature. But this legal trouble put him in the shady-operator class, and guests stopped dropping by his house.

For Frédéric it was a point of honor to go there even more often. He rented a box at the Théâtre Italiens, and took them there every week. But they had, unfortunately, reached that stage in an ill-matched marriage when the concessions they had had to make in the past had so fatigued them that life had now become unbearable. Madame Arnoux had to restrain herself from speaking out; Arnoux sat there in gloom; and the spectacle of those two unhappy creatures saddened Frédéric.

She had asked him—since Arnoux confided in him—to look into her husband's business affairs. But he felt ashamed, eating dinners with the man and coveting his wife. He continued nevertheless, rationalizing that he had to protect her, and that an occasion might arise in which he could be useful to her.

A week after the ball, he paid a visit to Monsieur Dambreuse. The financier offered him twenty shares in his coal company; Frédéric didn't go back again. Deslauriers wrote him letters; he didn't reply to them. Pellerin invited him to come and see the portrait; he kept putting him off. He did give in, though, to Cisy, who was anxious to meet Rosanette.

She received Frédéric in a friendly way, but without throwing her arms around him the way she used to do. His companion was thrilled to be in the home of an immoral woman, and above all to be able to converse with an actor: for when they arrived, Delmar was there.

A drama in which he'd played a peasant who lectures Louis XIV and prophesies the Revolution of '89 had been so popular that he kept getting cast in the same kind of role; and his whole function by now was to tell off the various monarchs around the globe. As an English brewer, he heaped abuse on Charles I; as a student in Salamanca, he cursed Philip II; as a heartbroken father, he indignantly reprimanded Madame Pompadour, and this was his finest hour! Street children waited to see him at the stage door; and his biography—on sale during the intermissions—depicted him as a combination of St. Vincent de Paul, Brutus, and Mirabeau. People referred to "our Delmar." He had a mission; he had become the Messiah.

All this fascinated Rosanette; and she had dumped old Oudry without any concern about her future, never having been the greedy type.

Arnoux, who was quite aware of this, had taken advantage of her nature for a long time, keeping her as a mistress at little expense to himself; the old man had come into the picture, and the three of them were very careful to avoid any difficult explanations. Then, thinking that she had got rid of the other man to be his alone, he had increased her allowance. But her demands inexplicably kept on increasing, even though she was living on a reduced scale; she had sold a number of things, including the cashmere shawl, claiming she wanted to clear some old debts; and he kept on paying up, because she bewitched him even as she abused him pitilessly. And so bills and invoices rained down on his house. Frédéric sensed a crisis in the air.

One day, he came to the house to see Madame Arnoux. She had gone out. Monsieur was working downstairs, in the shop.

Arnoux was indeed there, among his porcelain vases, trying to "snag" a couple of newlyweds, bourgeoises from the provinces. He was speaking of turning and throwing, of crackling and glazing; the couple, hoping to look like they understood what he was talking about, nodded eagerly, and they bought.

When the customers had left, he confided that he had had a little quarrel with his wife that morning. To keep her from making any more comments on his expenditures, he had told her that the Marshal was no longer his mistress. "I told her she was yours now."

Frédéric was indignant; but any reproaches might betray him; so he stammered: "Oh, that was wrong! That was wrong!"

"What difference does it make to you?" Arnoux asked. "What's so dishonorable about passing for her lover? I am! Doesn't it flatter you?"

Had she told him anything? Was this a sly allusion? Frédéric replied quickly: "No, of course not! On the contrary!"

"So, then?"

"Yes, that's right! It doesn't matter."

Arnoux continued, "Why don't you go over there anymore?"

Frédéric promised that he would.

"Oh, I almost forgot! You should . . . when the subject of Rosanette comes up . . . try to let my wife hear something . . . I don't know what, but you'll think of something . . . something that'll persuade her that you're her lover. I'm asking you this as a favor, you understand."

The young man's only response was an ambiguous grimace. This calumny would be fatal. He visited her that very evening and swore that Arnoux's allegation was false.

"Is that true? Really?"

He seemed to be sincere; and after she'd taken a deep breath, she said, "I believe you," with a lovely smile; then she lowered her head and said, without looking at him: "In any case, no one has any rights over you."

So she suspected nothing, and she must despise him because she believed him capable of loving somebody else! Frédéric, completely forgetting his attempts to seduce the other woman, found this freedom she was granting him insulting.

Then she asked him to go visit "that woman's home" now and then to keep an eye on the way things were.

Arnoux came in, and five minutes later wanted to take him along to Rosanette's.

This whole situation was becoming intolerable.

Relief came when his notary sent him a letter saying he was going to be sending the fifteen thousand francs; and in a bid to make up for neglecting Deslauriers, he went to tell him the good news.

The lawyer's rented rooms were on the Rue des Trois-Maries, on the fifth floor, facing the courtyard. His office was a cold little room, tiled, and hung with grayish paper; its principal decoration was a gold medal—the prize for his doctorate—set in an ebony frame, leaning up against the mirror. There was a mahogany bookcase, with some hundred volumes behind glass. A leather-topped desk sat in the middle of the room. Four old velvet armchairs occupied the corners; a fire of wood chips burned in the fireplace, with a log always ready to be thrown on when the bell sounded. It was his consultation hour; the lawyer was wearing a white cravat.

When he heard the news of the fifteen thousand francs—which he had probably given up on—he broke into a pleased chuckle. "That's good, old friend! That's very, very good!"

He threw the log onto the fire, sat back down again, and immediately began talking about the newspaper. The first thing to do was to get rid of Hussonet.

"That fool drives me crazy! Now as to the paper's viewpoint, the best thing seems to me not to have one at all."

Frédéric looked surprised.

"Yes, I mean it! It's about time we began treating politics scientifically. The old boys in the eighteenth century got started when Rousseau and the literary people introduced philanthropy, poetry, and all that, to the delight of the Catholics; which is a natural alliance when you think about it, because all the modern reformers, and I can prove this to you, are believers in Revelation. But if you go singing masses for Poland; if you replace the God of the Dominicans, who was an executioner, with the God of the Romantics, who's an interior decorator; if, I mean, your idea of the Absolute is no larger than that of your ancestors, monarchy is going to slip its way into all

your Republican institutions, and your red bonnet will be nothing more than a Cardinal's skullcap![60] The only new aspects will be that instead of torture there'll be solitary confinement, instead of the sin of sacrilege there'll be laws against offences against religion, and instead of the Holy Alliance there'll be the Concert of Europe.[61] And in this fine and admirable new order, made up of Louis XIV leftovers and Voltairean ruins with a nice coat of Imperial whitewash and a few fragments from the English constitution, we'll see municipal councils determined to harass the mayor, general councils their prefect, the press the established powers, and the government everybody else! We see oh-so-respectable souls going into raptures over the Civil Code, a collection manufactured in, whatever people say, a mean and petty, tyrannical spirit—because the legislator, instead of doing what he should have been doing, regularizing tradition, turned instead to try reshaping society like a modern Lycurgus![62] Why does the law put up roadblocks when a father wants to leave something to his heirs? Why does it get in the way of the forced sale of buildings? Why does it punish vagrancy like a crime, when it shouldn't even be a minor offense? And there are many others! I know all about them! So I'm going to write a novel called *The History of the Idea of Justice,* which will be hilarious! But damn it, I'm thirsty! How about you?"

He leaned out the window and shouted down to the concierge to go buy them some grog from the tavern.

"In short, I see three parties—no, I mean three groups, and none of them hold any interest for me: there are the haves, the used-to-haves, and the trying-to-haves. But they all agree on one thing: an imbecilic worship of Authority! Examples? Well, Mably recommends preventing philosophers from publishing their theories; Monsieur Wronski, geometrician, calls censorhip, in his language, 'the critical repression of speculative spontaneity'[63]; Father Enfantin blesses the Hapsburgs 'for having reached out over the Alps with a strong hand to put a curb on Italy'[64]; Pierre Leroux wants to force us all to listen to an orator, and Louis Blanc is inclined to establish a state religion, so much does this slavish people love being governed![65] But no government is legitimate, no matter what their eternal principles proclaim. Because the word 'principle' signifies 'origin,' and so they always have to go back to some revolution, some act of violence, some transient event. So, *our* principle is national sovereignty, which consists in parliamentary government, even though our parliament doesn't agree!

But why is sovereignty of the people more legitimate than the divine right of a king? They're both totally fictional! Enough metaphysics, enough ghosts from the past! You don't need a set of dogmas to keep the streets clean! People will say I'm trying to overthrow society! Well, so what? Not such a pretty sight, your society!"

Frédéric could think of quite a few things to say in response. But seeing how far Deslauriers had drifted away from the theories of Sénécal, he was happy to be indulgent. He contented himself with pointing out that a system like that would make everyone hate them.

"Oh, on the contrary, since we would be giving every party reasons to hate their neighbors, they'd all come to depend on us. You come in too and write some transcendental criticism for us!"

They'd have to attack all the received ideas, the Académie, the École Normale, the Conservatory, the Comédie-Française—anything that resembled an institution. That's the only way they could create a body of doctrine for the paper. Then, once that was established, the paper could turn quickly into a daily; and at that point, they could begin attacking individuals.

"We'll be respected, you can count on that!"

Deslauriers was nearing his old dream: being an editor-in-chief—that is to say, having the inexpressible happiness of controlling others, slashing their articles apart, commissioning articles and then rejecting them. His eyes sparkled behind his spectacles as he exulted, downing one small glass after another, mechanically.

"You'll have to give a dinner once a week. That's indispensable, even if it costs you half your income! People will want to come, it'll be a kind of headquarters for others, and a lever for you—and manipulating public opinion by the two instruments of literature and politics, within six months, you'll see, we'll have all Paris at our feet!"

Listening to him, Frédéric felt rejuvenated, like a man who's been cooped up in a room for a long time and suddenly finds himself out in the fresh air. That enthusiasm won him over.

"Yes, I've been lazy and stupid—I admit it!"

"And high time!" exclaimed Deslauriers. "My Frédéric is back!"

Then, putting his fist under Frédéric's chin, he said: "You know you've made me suffer. But never mind! I love you just the same."

They were standing and looking at each other, both of them feeling touched, both on the point of embracing the other.

A woman's hat could be seen approaching the doorway.

"What brings you here?"

It was Mademoiselle Clémence, Deslauriers's mistress.

She said that she happened to be passing by and had an irresistible urge to see him; and so they might have a little meal together, she had brought some cakes, which she now laid out on the table.

"Look out for my papers!" the lawyer exclaimed bitterly. "And this is the third time I've told you not to come in during my consultation hours."

She tried to embrace him.

"All right! That's enough. Get lost."

He pushed her away, and she sobbed aloud.

"Oh, you're such a bore!"

"But I love you!"

"I don't want you to love me, just to do what I say!"

That cruel remark stopped Clémence's tears. She stood at the window, her forehead against the glass.

Her pose and her silence irritated Deslauriers.

"When you're finished, you can find a cab for yourself, can't you?" She spun around to face him.

"You're throwing me out?"

"Exactly!"

She fixed her big blue eyes on him, no doubt in a final plea, then knotted two ends of her plaid shawl together, waited for another moment, and then left.

"You should call her back," said Frédéric.

"No chance."

Then, because he had to be going, Deslauriers went into his kitchen, which did double duty as his dressing room. On the flagstone floor there were a pair of boots, the remains of a meager breakfast, and a rolled-up mattress and blanket leaning in the corner.

"This ought to prove to you that I'm not in the habit of receiving visits from marquises! But then, I can do without them just fine, and the others too. The ones you don't pay take up your time, which is money in another form—now, I'm not rich! Besides, they're all so stupid! So stupid! Honestly, can you really have a conversation with a woman?"

They separated at the corner of the Pont-Neuf.

"So, it's settled then! You'll bring the money along tomorrow, as soon as you get it."

"Agreed!" said Frédéric.

The next morning, he found a banknote for fifteen thousand francs in his mail.

That little slip of paper represented fifteen big bags of money to him; and he said to himself that with that sum he could: first, keep his coach for three years, instead of having to sell it off as he was about to be forced to do; or second, buy the two beautiful sets of damascened armor he had seen on the Quai Voltaire, along with a host of other items, like paintings, books, and countless bouquets and gifts for Madame Arnoux! Any of those would have been a much wiser expenditure than risking losing it all on this newspaper! Deslauriers today struck him as having been presumptuous, and his unfeeling behavior the day before had cooled Frédéric's affection for him; and now, while he was giving himself up to his feelings of regret, he was surprised to see Arnoux walk in—and then go sit on the edge of the bed, heavily, like a man who was overwhelmed.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm done for!"

Arnoux had to go that very day to the office of Monsieur Beauminet, a notary on the Rue Sainte-Anne, and hand over the eighteen thousand francs that had been lent to him by a man named Vanneroy.

"The whole disaster makes no sense! I gave him a mortgage, which should have been enough to calm him down, but no! Now he's threatening me with a court order if I don't pay it in full this afternoon!"

"And then what?"

"Then it's very simple! He'll take my house. The first notice that goes up does it for me—I'll be ruined, and that's that! Ah, but if I could find somebody to advance me that damned sum, then he'd take Vanneroy's place and I'd be saved! You wouldn't happen to have it, would you?"

The banknote was still on his night table, next to a book. Frédéric picked up the book and set it on top of the note, while saying, "Good God—my poor friend!"

But it hurt him to turn Arnoux down.

"But don't you think you could find someone who . . ."

"No—there's nobody! And to think that in a week I'll have money coming in! I expect maybe . . . fifteen thousand francs at the end of the month!"

"But couldn't you ask some of your debtors to advance you some . . ."

"Ha! That's likely."

"But you have some securities, some bonds, surely?"

"Not a thing!"

"Well, what can you do?" asked Frédéric.

"That's the question I keep asking myself," Arnoux replied.

Growing silent, he paced up and down the room.

"It's not for me, God knows! But for my children, my poor wife!"

Then, enunciating each word slowly: "Anyway . . . I'll be strong . . . I'll sell everything off . . . and I'll go . . . somewhere . . . and start all over . . . I don't know where!"

"That's impossible!" cried Frédéric.

Arnoux replied calmly, "How could I possibly go on living in Paris now?"

There was a long silence.

Frédéric said, hesitantly, "When do you think you could pay it back, the money?"

Not that he had it, of course: on the contrary! But nothing was stopping him from approaching some friends, trying some things. He rang for his servant to get him dressed. Arnoux thanked him.

"So it's eighteen thousand you need, correct?"

"Oh, sixteen would do it! Because I can get two thousand five hundred, maybe three thousand from my silver as long as Vanneroy gives me until tomorrow—and just to be clear, you can promise the lender that in a week, maybe five or six days, the sum will be repaid. And if not, there's still the mortgage. So there's no risk, you see?"

Frédéric assured him that he understood, and that he would get started on it immediately.

But then he remained at home, cursing Deslauriers, for he wanted both to keep his word and help Arnoux out.

"What if I approached Monsieur Dambreuse? But what could I tell him the money was for? In fact I'm the one who ought to be giving him money, for his coal shares! Oh, let him and his shares go to hell! I don't owe him anything."

And Frédéric applauded himself for his independence, as if he had just refused a favor to Monsieur Dambreuse.

"Well," he said to himself, "since I'm taking a loss here . . . because with that fifteen thousand francs I could have made a hundred thousand! It happens sometimes on the stock market . . . So, since I'm

turning down one of them, I'm free, aren't I? Anyway, Deslauriers can just wait! But no, no, that's not right; let's get going."

He looked at the clock.

"Oh, there's no hurry! The bank doesn't close till five."

At four-thirty, when he had withdrawn the money: "There's no point! He won't be in now—I'll go tonight." Saying that gave him a way to reverse his decision; for everyone's conscience has absorbed something from the stream of sophistry that's been poured into it, and we retain it, like the aftertaste of a bad liqueur.

He strolled along the boulevards and had dinner in a restaurant. Then he took in a brief show at the Vaudeville for some amusement. But the money in his pocket continued to trouble him, as if he had stolen it. He wouldn't have been terribly upset if he'd lost it.

When he got back home, he found a letter that read as follows:

> *Any news? My wife joins me, my dear friend, in hoping for the best . . .*
>
> *Yours.*

It was signed with initials.

"His wife! She needs my help!"

And just then Arnoux himself came in, to learn whether he'd been able to find the money.

"Here it is—take it!" said Frédéric.

Twenty-four hours later, he wrote to Deslauriers: "I didn't receive it."

The lawyer came by three days in a row. He urged Frédéric to write to the notary. He even offered to go to Le Havre himself.

"No, there's no point in that! I'll go there myself."

At the end of the week, Frédéric timidly asked Monsieur Arnoux for his fifteen thousand francs.

Arnoux would send them the next day—then the day after that. Frédéric risked going out only at night, for fear he'd run into Deslauriers.

One evening, he bumped into someone near the Madeleine. It was he.

"I'm on my way to get it now," Frédéric said.

And Deslauriers accompanied him to the door of a house in the Faubourg Poissonière.

"Wait here for me."

He waited. Finally, after three quarters of an hour, Frédéric emerged with Arnoux and made a sign for him to be patient a little longer. The faience merchant and his friend went off, arm in arm, down the Rue Hauteville, turning onto the Rue de Chabrol.

The evening was dark, with warm gusts of wind. Arnoux walked along at a leisurely pace, talking about the Galeries du Commerce, a suite of covered passages that would link the Boulevard St. Denis to Châtelet, a marvelous enterprise he wished he could get in on; and from time to time he would stop to gawk at shop girls' pretty faces in the windows, and then pick up the thread of his conversation again.

Frédéric could hear Deslauriers' footsteps behind them sounding like reproaches, like so many blows upon his conscience. But still he didn't have the nerve to ask for the money, partly out of shame, and partly out of the fear that it would be useless. But the other was getting closer. It was time.

Arnoux, in the most casual manner possible, said that his payments hadn't come in, so at the moment he wasn't able to return the fifteen thousand francs.

"You don't especially need it, do you?"

Just then, Deslauriers came up to Frédéric and pulled him aside. "Just tell me the truth. Do you have it, or don't you?"

"Well, no!" said Frédéric. "I lost it!"

"Lost it? How?"

"Gambling."

Deslauriers didn't say a word; he bowed low and then left. Arnoux had taken advantage of the moment to stop in a tobacco shop and light a cigar. When he came out he asked who that young man had been.

"Nobody! A friend!"

A few minutes later, they were at Rosanette's door.

"Go on in," said Arnoux; "she'll be glad to see you. You've been so standoffish lately!"

A street lamp lit up his face; with his cigar between his teeth and his cheerful air, he was simply intolerable.

"Oh, by the way, my notary went to see yours this morning, about getting that mortgage registered. It was my wife who reminded me of it."

"An intelligent woman!" Frédéric said mechanically.

"She is that!"

And Arnoux launched into singing her praises. There was nobody like her when it came to intelligence, heart, thriftiness; he added, in a low voice, rolling his eyes: "And talk about a woman's body!"

"Good night!" said Frédéric.

Arnoux started. "Good lord! What's wrong?"

His hand half extended toward Frédéric, he looked at him, clearly concerned about the fury on the younger man's face.

Frédéric only said, brusquely, "Good night!"

He walked down the Rue de Bréda like a rock rolling down a hillside, distressed and disconsolate, furious with Arnoux, swearing never to see him again, or her either. Instead of the rupture he'd been expecting, Arnoux was now even more warmly attached to her, from the hair on her head to the depths of her soul. The man's vulgarity exasperated Frédéric. Anything he wanted, he got! He pictured him again, standing in front of the slut's doorway, and his break with him felt mortifiying, a feeling aggravated by his own sense of powerlessness. Moreover, Arnoux's honesty in offering security for the money humiliated him; he wished he could strangle him; and hovering up above all that vexation, like a cloud of fog, was his conscience, telling him how cowardly he'd been toward his friend. His tears choked him.

Deslauriers was hurtling down the Rue des Martyrs, cursing out loud with indignation; for his great project, like a toppled obelisk, now seemed to him to reveal its true grandeur. He felt robbed, as if he'd just suffered a grievous hurt. His friendship with Frédéric was dead, and that gave him joy; it was at least some compensation! He was overwhelmed with a hatred for the rich. He thought of Sénécal's opinions and determined to go back to supporting him.

At the same time, Arnoux was lolling comfortably in an easy chair, breathing in the aroma of his cup of tea, the Marshal seated on his lap.

Frédéric would return to them no more; and to get his mind off his disastrous passion, he snatched at the first subject that came to mind, determining to write a history of the Renaissance. He heaped his table with books by humanists, philosophers, and poets; he went to the print room to see engravings by Marcantonio;[66] he tried to understand Machiavelli. Bit by bit, the serenity of the work calmed him down. Plunging deeply into the personalities of others, he forgot his own—which may be the only way to avoid suffering from it.

One day, while he was peacefully taking notes, his door opened and the servant announced Madame Arnoux.

It was really her! Alone? Ah, no—for she was holding little Eugène by the hand, followed by her nursemaid in a white apron. She sat down; and after a little cough, she said, "We haven't seen you at the house for a long time."

Frédéric could think of no excuse, and she added, "What you did showed true sensitivity!"

He replied, "What sensitivity?"

"What you did for Arnoux!" she said.

Frédéric made a gesture signifying that it was nothing, and that he really did it for her.

She sent the boy to play with the nursemaid in the drawing room. He and she exchanged a few remarks on their respective healths, then fell silent.

She wore a dress of brown silk, the color reminiscent of Spanish wine, with a black velvet jacket trimmed in sable—the fur made him want to stroke it; and her hair, parted in two long sleek bandeaux, seemed to draw his lips toward it. But something was troubling her, and turning her eyes to the drawing room door: "It's a little warm in here!"

Frédéric understood the prudence that underlay her glance and her remark. "I'm sorry—the door hasn't quite been closed."

"Ah, that's right!"

And she smiled, as if to say, "I'm not worried about anything."

He immediately asked her what brought her there today.

"My husband," she replied, with some effort, "asked me to come see you, not daring to do it himself."

"Why?"

"You know Monsieur Dambreuse, don't you?"

"I know him slightly, yes."

"Ah—slightly."

She fell silent.

"That doesn't matter. Please go on."

Then she explained that a couple of days ago Arnoux had been unable to meet four promissory notes for a thousand francs, payable to a banker, and that she had signed for them. Now she repented having compromised her children's financial future. But anything was better than dishonor; and, if Monsieur Dambreuse would call off the legal

proceedings, he would definitely be paid back soon; for she was going to sell off a small house she owned in Chartres.

"Poor woman," Frédéric murmured. Then: "I'll go! You can count on me."

"Thank you!"

And she rose as if to go.

"Oh! There's no need for you to rush off."

She stood there, examining the trophy of Mongolian arrows that hung from the ceiling, the bookshelves, the bindings, all the various writing materials; she picked up the bronze bowls where he kept his pens; her heels rested on different spots on the carpet. She had come to Frédéric's place several times, but always with Arnoux. Now they found themselves alone together—alone, here in his own house—it was an extraordinary event, almost a sign of good things to come.

She wanted to see his little garden; he offered his arm to show her around his domain, a thirty-foot square plot, houses on all sides, ornamented with shrubs in the corners and a flowerbed in the middle.

It was one of the first days of April. The leaves of the lilac bushes were beginning to turn green already, the breeze was pure and fresh, and little birds were cheeping, their song alternating with that of a distant pounding, coming from the forge of a coach-builder.

Frédéric went to fetch the little shovel from the fireplace; and while they walked around the garden, the boy made sand castles on the path.

Madame Arnoux feared he wouldn't have much imagination when he grew up, but he was an affectionate boy. His sister, on the other hand, had a callousness about her that wounded her mother sometimes.

"It'll change," said Frédéric. "We should never despair."

She repeated: "We should never despair!"

The mechanical repetition of his phrase seemed to be a kind of encouragement; he clipped a rose, the only one in the garden.

"Do you remember . . . a certain bouquet of roses, one evening, in a cab?"

She reddened a little; and then, in a tone that seemed to mock compassion: "Ah, I was so young then!"

"And will this rose," Frédéric continued in a low voice, "end up the same way?"

"No! This one I'll keep."

She gestured to the nursemaid, who picked up the little boy; then, when they had left and were standing on the street, Madame Arnoux smelled the flower, her head inclined toward her shoulder, on her face an expression as sweet as a kiss.

When Frédéric was back in his study, he gazed at the chair she'd sat in, and at all the objects she'd touched. Something of her was still there, circulating around him. The caress of her presence could still be felt.

"So, she's really been here!" he said to himself.

And he felt himself sink under the waves of an infinite love.

The next day at eleven, he was at Monsieur Dambreuse's. He was received in the dining room, where the banker and his wife were having their lunch, sitting across from each other. Her niece sat by her, and on the other side sat her governess, an English woman, heavily pockmarked.

Monsieur Dambreuse invited his young friend to join them, and when he refused, said: "Well, what can I do for you? I'm listening."

Frédéric explained, affecting indifference, that he'd come at the request of a certain Arnoux.

"Ah yes! The one who used to be an art dealer," said the banker with a silent laugh that exposed his gums. "He used to be backed by Oudry, but the two of them have quarreled."

He began looking through the letters and newspapers that had been laid out next to his plate.

Two servants went soundlessly about, waiting on them; and the height of the room's ceiling, its three tapestry door-curtains and two white marble fountains, the gleam of the dishwarmers, the arrangement of the hors-d'oeuvres, even the precise, stiff folds of the napkins—all of this high-level luxury formed a powerful contrast in Frédéric's mind as he recalled another meal at the Arnoux home. He dared not interrupt Monsieur Dambreuse.

Madame noticed his embarrassment.

"Do you see much of our friend Martinon?"

"He's coming tonight," said the girl.

"Ah! Is that so?" her aunt replied, giving her a cold stare.

Then one of the servants bent over and whispered something to her: "Your dressmaker, child! . . . Miss John!"

And the governess obeyed, bringing the girl along with her.

Monsieur Dambreuse, annoyed by the disorder of the chairs, asked what was going on.

"It's Madame Regimbart."

"Regimbart! Wait a minute! I know that name. I've come across his signature."

Frédéric finally felt he could broach the subject; Arnoux deserved some consideration; he was even about to sell one of his wife's properties solely in order to meet his obligations.

"I hear the wife is very pretty," said Madame Dambreuse.

The banker added, in a jovial tone, "Are you an . . . intimate friend of theirs?"

Frédéric sidestepped the question, saying that he would be much obliged if he would consider . . .

"Well, fine, if it will please you, so be it! We'll wait! I still have time. Shall we go down to my office?"

The meal was over. Madame Dambreuse bowed very slightly, with a meaningful smile, both polite and ironic at once. Frédéric had no time to think about it, because as soon as he and Monsieur Dambreuse were alone: "You haven't come by to pick up your shares."

And without giving him time to apologize: "That's fine! You deserve to know a little more about the business."

The French Coal Consortium had been set up; now they were only waiting for the official decree of approval. Just merging the different companies together would lead to greater profits in itself, by immediately reducing management and labor costs. Moreover, the Consortium was considering a new approach, to give the workers themselves an interest in the business. It would construct houses, healthful living conditions; and it would become the main source for everything the employees needed, selling to them at cost.

"And they'll be the better for it, monsieur. This is real progress—and it'll be a crushing response to those whining and complaining Republicans! We have on our board—" and here he unfolded the prospectus—"a peer of France, a member of the Institut, a retired officer from the army's engineers, all of them well known! That's the kind of board that reassures the nervous investor and attracts the smart ones! The Consortium will be getting orders from the State as well as the railroad companies, the steamship lines, the ironworks, the gas companies, and even from bourgeois kitchens. So we'll be providing light and heat, our reach penetrating right into the humblest households. But you'll ask, how can we be sure of sales? We'll get them thanks to tariffs, my dear monsieur, and yes, we will get the tariffs; we'll be

sure of that! Anyway, I've always been a thorough protectionist: our country first!" He had been named director, but he didn't have the time to attend to certain tasks, like writing reports, for one thing. "I'm not so good when it comes to the great writers—I've forgotten all my Greek! I could use someone . . . who could translate my ideas." And then, abruptly: "Would you like to be that someone, with the title of Secretary General?"

Frédéric didn't know what to say.

"What's standing in your way?"

His only duties would be writing annual reports for the shareholders. He would find himself establishing connections with the most important men in Paris. Representing the Consortium to the workers, he would naturally have them adoring him, and that would allow him, a little later, to move up to the General Council and even to become a *député.*

Frédéric's ears were burning. Where was all this benevolence coming from? He stammered out his thanks.

But it was crucial that he not be dependent on anyone, said the banker. The best way would be to own some shares, "which would put you in a superb position, as your capital would guarantee your position, and your position your capital."

"How much, roughly, should I put in?" asked Frédéric.

"Good heavens, whatever you like—maybe something like forty, sixty thousand francs, I suppose."

The sum was so minimal in Monsieur Dambreuse's eyes, and his authority so grand, that the young man immediately decided to sell off a farm. He accepted. Monsieur Dambreuse would fix a day soon to finalize their arrangement.

"And so, I can tell Jacques Arnoux . . ."

"Whatever you'd like! The poor fellow! Whatever you'd like!"

Frédéric wrote a note to say that Arnoux and his wife could rest easy, and he had it delivered by his servant, who brought back the reply: "Very good!"

His efforts deserved better than that. He expected a visit or a letter at least. There was no visit. There was no letter.

Had they simply forgotten, or was it intentional? Since Madame Arnoux had come to visit him once, what kept her from coming again? That almost-hint, that almost-admission she'd made—was it

just a maneuver on her part, just self-interest? "Are they just toying with me? And is she in on it?" A kind of reserve on his part kept him from going to visit them, even though he wanted to.

One morning (three weeks after their conversation), Monsieur Dambreuse wrote that he was expecting him that day, in an hour.

While he made his way there, the thought of Arnoux and his wife plagued him again, and unable to account for their conduct, he was seized by anguish, a dark sense of presentiment. To shake it off, he hailed a cab and had it take him to the Rue Paradis.

Arnoux was off on a trip.

"And madame?"

"In the country, at the factory!"

"When will monsieur be returning?"

"Tomorrow, for sure."

He would find her alone there; this was the moment. Something cried out within him, imperiously: "Go to her!"

But Monsieur Dambreuse? "Ah, too bad. Well, I'll say that I was ill." He raced to the train station. Once seated in his car: "Am I doing something stupid? Oh—what's the difference!"

To the right and the left, green fields stretched out; the train rolled on; the little station houses slipped by, looking like stage sets; and the smoke from the engine, always on the same side, blew out in great white wreaths that danced across the grass and then evaporated.

Frédéric, alone in his seat, watched it all with boredom, sunk into that languor that results from extreme impatience. But then there appeared cranes and warehouses. It was Creil.

The town was built on the slopes of two low hills—one bare and the other wooded at the top—and with its church tower, its houses of different sizes and styles, and its stone bridge, there seemed to be something cheerful about it, something discreet, something good. A great flat-bottomed boat was floating down the river, waves whipped up by the winds; chickens, at the foot of a calvary, were pecking in the straw; a woman walked past, carrying a damp load of laundry on her head.

After the bridge he found himself on an island, from which he could see, off to the right, a ruined abbey. The wheel of a mill was turning, the mill itself spanning the second branch of the river Oise, above which was perched the factory. The size of the building greatly

surprised Frédéric, and he felt more respect for Arnoux. A little farther on, he turned down a narrow street, closed off at the end by an iron gate.

He went in. The woman at the gate shouted for him to come over.

"Do you have a permit?" she asked.

"Why?"

"To come into the factory!"

Frédéric said curtly that he had come to see Monsieur Arnoux.

"And who's this Monsieur Arnoux?"

"The boss—the owner, the proprietor!"

"No, monsieur. This factory is owned by Messieurs Leboeuf and Milliet!"

The woman must surely have been joking. Some workers came in; he approached two or three of them; the response was always the same.

Frédéric left the place, stumbling like a drunken man; and he looked so utterly lost that a bourgeois smoking his pipe on the Boucherie bridge asked if he could help him find someplace. This man did know of Arnoux's factory. It was in Montataire.

Frédéric asked about a carriage. You could only get one at the station, so back he went. In front of the baggage claim stood a broken-down barouche, hitched to an old horse whose harness, falling apart, was dangling between the shafts. There was no one around.

A street boy offered to find "old Pilon." Ten minutes went by, and the boy finally re-appeared: Pilon was eating his lunch. Frédéric, who couldn't stand it any longer, took off on his own. Finding the bar down on the railway crossing, he had to stand and wait while two trains passed. But finally he hurried off into the countryside.

The monotonous expanses of green made him think of billiard tables. The roadway itself was littered on both sides with heaps of iron slag, like piles of pebbles. A little farther on were smoking factory chimneys, set close to each other, and directly ahead of him, on a hill, stood a small, turreted chateau with the square tower of a church. Below it, long walls formed uneven lines among the trees; and below them stretched the houses of the village itself.

The houses were all one story, each with three steps made from stone blocks. Now and then, in the distance, the sound of a grocer's bell could be heard. As Frederic, in his heavy shoes, was struggling

with the thick black mud, a fine rain began to fall, crosshatching the pale sky with a thousand little strokes.

Frédéric stayed in the middle of the paved road; then he saw a path on his left, at the end of which stood a large wooden arch, containing one word, in gold letters: FAIENCES.

It had not been mere chance that led Jacques Arnoux to choose a place close to Creil; by locating his factory as close as possible to the other one (which had enjoyed a long-established reputation), he could hope the public would confuse the two, to his benefit.

The main building stood on the bank of a river running through meadows. The proprietor's house, surrounded by a garden, stood out by virtue of a flight of steps on which cactus plants bristled in four large vases. Piles of white clay were drying in sheds; some others were out in the open; and there in the middle of the yard stood Sénécal, wearing his eternal blue overcoat with its red lining.

The ex-tutor held out a cold hand.

"You here to see the boss? He's not here."

Frédéric, disconcerted, unwisely replied, "I know." But then, catching himself at once, "I'm here on an issue that concerns Madame Arnoux. Can she see me?"

"Oh, I haven't seen her for the past three days," said Sénécal.

And he launched into a litany of complaints. When he accepted this factory job, he thought he would be living in Paris, not have to bury himself out here in the country, with no friends and no newspapers. But never mind! He'd got over all that. But Arnoux didn't pay any attention to his good qualities. The man was limited, backward, as ignorant as they come. Instead of haring off after artistic effects, he ought to be installing coal and gas heating. The boss was "going under"; Sénécal emphasized the phrase. In short, he didn't like his work; and he practically ordered Frédéric to put in a good word for him, to get him a raise.

"Rest assured!" said Frédéric.

He encountered no one on the stairs. On the second floor he peeped into an empty room; this had to be the drawing room. He called out at the top of his voice. No one responded; the cook must have been out, the maid too. Finally, going up to the next floor, he opened a door. Madame Arnoux, alone, stood in front of an armoire mirror. The belt of her dressing gown, which was half open, hung

down around her hips. On one side her black hair fell over a shoulder in a black wave; and her arms were raised as she held her chignon with one hand and inserted a pin into it with the other. She uttered a little cry of alarm, and vanished.

Soon she came back, properly dressed. Her figure, her eyes, the rustle of her dress, everything enchanted him. Frédéric had to force himself not to rush over and cover her with kisses.

"You must excuse me," she said, "but I couldn't . . ."

He was bold enough to interrupt her: "But . . . you looked wonderful . . . just now."

She seemed to find the compliment a little crude, for her cheeks colored. He was afraid he'd offended her. She went on: "What brings you here?"

He couldn't think of a reply; and then, after a little chuckle that bought him a few seconds to think: "If I told you, would you believe me?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

Frédéric explained that he'd had a terrible dream the other night. "I dreamed that you were very ill, and close to death."

"Oh no—my husband and I, we're never sick!"

"My dream was only about you."

She looked at him calmly. "Dreams don't always come true."

Frédéric stammered, seeking the right words, and finally went into a long speech on the subtle connections between souls. There was a power that could bring two people together, even if great distances separated them, and let each know what the other was feeling.

She listened, her head bowed, smiling that beautiful smile of hers. He saw it out of the corner of his eye and rejoiced, pouring out his love more freely in the form of banalities. She suggested showing him around the factory; and since she insisted, he accepted.

To distract him with something amusing, she took him to see the sort of museum collection that decorated the staircases. The specimens hanging on the walls or arranged on shelves bore witness to Arnoux's successive efforts and enthusiasms. After having sought the secret of the Chinese copper red, he had tried working with majolica, faience, Etruscan and oriental china, and even tried his hand at some of the refinements that were perfected later on. So the collection included huge vases covered with mandarins, bowls in iridescent

bronze, pots ornamented with Arabic writing, pitchers in Renaissance style, and large plates with two figures drawn on them as if in red chalk, the style precious and ethereal. Nowadays he was making commercial signs and wine labels; but his intellect was not lofty enough to allow him to reach the level of Art, nor bourgeois enough to help him stick strictly to what would sell—and so he satisfied nobody and brought about his own ruin. The pair were contemplating all this when Mademoiselle Marthe passed by.

"You recognize him, don't you?" her mother asked.

"Of course!" she replied, greeting him while her clear-eyed, suspicious, virginal gaze seemed to be murmuring, "What do you think you're doing here?" She went up the stairs, turning her head slightly over her shoulder.

Madame Arnoux led Frédéric into the yard and proceeded to explain, with the greatest of seriousness, how they crushed, cleaned, and sifted the clay.

"The preparation of the pastes is critical."

And she took him into a room filled with vats, where vertical axles with horizontal arms were steadily revolving. Frédéric began to wish he had declined her offer of the tour right when she proposed it.

"Here we have the blungers," she said.

He thought the word grotesque, and somehow unseemly on her lips.

Wide belts ran across the ceiling from one end of the room to the other, winding themselves around drums, the whole complex mechanism moving to a continuous, mathematically precise, and irritating rhythm.

From there they went on to pass a small ramshackle hut, which used to be a toolshed.

"It's not in use anymore," she said.

He replied in a trembling voice: "There's room enough for happiness in there!"

But the racket made by the fire pump drowned out his words, and they proceeded to the modeling room.

Men were sitting at a narrow table, placing hunks of paste onto revolving disks; their left hands scooped out the interior, while their right smoothed the surface, so that you could see vases rising up like so many blossoming flowers.

Madame Arnoux showed him the molds for the more complicated pieces.

In another room, workers were decorating pots with bands, grooves, and projecting lines. On the upper floor, the joins were being smoothed out, and tiny holes left from the preceding operations were being filled in with plaster.

Rows of pots were everywhere—on the grids, in the corners, in the middle of the corridors.

Frédéric was becoming bored.

"But maybe all this is tiring you?" she asked.

Not wanting his visit to end, he pretended that, on the contrary, it was all fascinating. In fact he regretted not having gone into this field himself.

She seemed surprised.

"Really! I could have come and lived near you!"

He tried to make eye contact with her, but Madame Arnoux avoided looking at him, and turning to a table, picked up some little paste balls that were left there from some unsuccessful repairs, flattened them into a cake, and then imprinted her hand onto it.

"May I keep that?" asked Frédéric.

"Are you really that much of a child? Good God!"

He was about to reply when Sénécal came in.

The manager noticed, the instant he crossed the threshold, that there had been a violation of procedure. The workshops were supposed to be swept out once a week; here it was Saturday, and the workers having not done anything of the sort, Sénécal declared that they would have to stay on an extra hour.

"And that's just too bad for you!"

They bent over their pieces without so much as a murmur; but from the hoarse way they were breathing, it wasn't hard to guess at their anger. They weren't an easy bunch to handle anyway, all of them having been fired from the larger factory. The republican ruled over them with an iron fist. A man of theory, Sénécal only saw the masses, and was always pitiless when it came to individuals.

Frédéric, annoyed at his presence, quietly asked Madame Arnoux if he could possibly see the ovens. They went down to the ground floor; and she was in the process of explaining the uses of another

kind of mold when Sénécal, who had followed them, pushed his way between them.

He took over the demonstration, expatiating on the various kinds of fuels, the ways of loading the ovens, the pyroscopes, the kiln hearths, the kinds of slips, lusters, and metals, using a hoard of chemical terminology, like chloride, sulfur, borax, and carbonate. Frédéric didn't understand a word of it, and he kept turning to Madame Arnoux.

"You aren't listening," she said. "Monsieur Sénécal is being perfectly clear. He knows all these things much better than I do."

The mathematician, flattered by such praise, suggested that they go visit the coloring room. Frédéric cast an anxious look at Madame Arnoux. She remained impassive, evidently unwilling to be alone with him, yet unwilling to let him go. He offered his arm.

"No, thank you! The stairway is too narrow."

And when they reached the top, Sénécal opened the door to a room filled with women.

They were working with paintbrushes, little vials, shells, and glass plates. Along the cornice, leaning against the wall, were rows of engraved blocks; fine little scraps of paper floated in the air; and an iron stove was throwing out a sickening heat, mingled with the smell of turpentine.

Nearly all the women were dressed in ragged clothes. But there was one who stood out, wearing a madras kerchief and big, dangling earrings. Slender yet not thin, she had large black eyes and the full lips of an African woman. Her large breasts pushed out her blouse, which was fastened around her waist by the belt of her skirt; and, with one elbow on the table, her other arm hanging at her side, she was gazing vaguely out at the countryside. A bottle of wine and some cold meat were on the table beside her.

A rule forbade eating in the workshops, both to keep the products clean and to ensure the health of the workers.

Sénécal, whether out of a sense of duty or a need to be domineering, shouted at her from across the room, pointing to a framed notice on the wall.

"Hey, you, the one from Bordeaux! Read me article nine from that notice!"

"So what?"

"So what, mademoiselle? That's a fine of three francs for you!"

She stared him right in the face, insolently.

"What do I care? When the boss gets back, he'll cancel your fine. To hell with you, little man!"

Sénécal, pacing back and forth with his hands behind his back like a schoolroom monitor, only smiled.

"Article thirteen, insubordination—ten francs!"

The Bordelaise went back to her work. Madame Arnoux, out of a sense of propriety, said nothing, but she frowned. Frédéric murmured, "You're being pretty harsh for a democrat!"

The other replied in a magisterial tone: "Democracy isn't giving individuals a free pass to do what they like. It's being equal under the law, the division of labor, order!"

"You're forgetting humanity!" said Frédéric.

Madame Arnoux took his arm; Sénécal, probably offended at that silent rebuke, left.

Frédéric felt an enormous relief. Ever since that morning, he'd been looking for a chance to declare himself; and now the chance had come. Moreover, the spontaneous gesture of Madame Arnoux implied promises; and he asked, using the pretext that his feet were cold, if they could go back up to her room. But when he was seated near her, his awkward timidity got in the way; he couldn't find a way to begin. Then fortunately, Sénécal came to mind.

"There's nothing stupider," he said, "than a fine like that."

Madame Arnoux replied, "Sometimes one has to be strict."

"But you're such a kind person! Oh—now I remember: you sometimes enjoy seeing other people suffer!"

"Is that a riddle? I don't follow you, my friend."

Her severe expression, more than what she said, brought him up short. But Frédéric was determined to go on with it. A volume of Musset happened to be lying on a table.[67] He flipped through a few pages, and then began to speak of love, its despairs and its ecstasies.

All that, as far as Madame Arnoux was concerned, was either criminal or fake.

The denial wounded the young man; and to fight back, he cited the suicides reported in the papers every day, and he heaped praises upon the great lovers of literature: Phaedra, Dido, Romeo, Des Grieux.[68] He kept digging himself in deeper.

The fire in the fireplace had gone out; outside, the rain lashed against the windows. Madame Arnoux sat very still, her two hands on the arms of her chair; the ribbons on her bonnet hung down like the headbands of a sphinx; her profile stood out vividly against the darkening room.

He felt like throwing himself at her feet. He heard what might have been a footstep in the corridor; he didn't dare.

But what held him back more than that was an almost religious fear. That dress of hers, merging into the shadows, seemed beyond all measure, infinite, impossible to lift; and precisely because of that, his desire redoubled. Yet the fear of doing too much or too little took away all his powers of judgment.

If she doesn't like me, he thought, then let her throw me out! If she does want me, let her give me some sign of encouragement!

He said with a sigh: "So you don't believe that a man can fall in love with . . . a woman?"

Madame Arnoux replied, "If she's not married, he can marry her; if she belongs to someone else, he moves on."

"So happiness is impossible, then?"

"No! But you don't find happiness in lies, anxiety, and guilt."

"What do those things matter, when it's a question of sublime joys!"

"The price is too high."

He tried attacking via irony. "So virtue is really only cowardice?"

"It's more like clear-sightedness. Even if a woman forgets her duty and her religion, her common sense should be enough. Self-interest is a solid foundation for making intelligent choices."

"Oh, what a collection of bourgeois maxims you have!"

"But I don't pretend to be a great lady."

At that moment, the little boy ran in: "Mama, are you coming to dinner?"

"Yes, right away!"

Frédéric stood up, and just then Marthe came in.

He couldn't make up his mind to leave; then, with an expression of pure supplication: "So women like those are completely heartless?"

"Not at all! But they can be deaf when the situation requires it."

And she stood in the doorway, her children on either side of her. He bowed, not saying a word; she bowed as well, silently.

His first sensation was of utter stupefaction. Her manner of making him understand the futility of his hopes had crushed him. He felt

lost, like a man who's tumbled into an abyss, who knows that no help is coming, and who expects only to die there.

But nonetheless he did walk, but randomly, seeing nothing; he stumbled on stones; he took the wrong path. The clatter of sabots echoed close by; it was the workers, leaving the factory. Then he realized where he was.

On the horizon, the lights on the train formed a straight line of fire. He got to the station just as a train was about to pull out; he let himself be pushed into a seat, and he fell asleep.

An hour later, on the boulevards, the liveliness of Paris in the evening abruptly relegated his journey to an already distant past. He wanted to be strong, and he bucked himself up by devising insulting phrases for Madame Arnoux: "She's an imbecile, a fool, a beast—we're done with her!"

Back at his home, he discovered an eight-page letter on blue glazed paper, signed R. A.

It began with some friendly reproaches:

What's become of you, dear one? I'm bored!

But the writing was so dreadful that Frédéric was about to throw the whole packet away when he caught sight of a P.S.

I'm counting on you to take me to the races tomorrow.

What was this invitation all about? Was this just another whim of the Marshal's? But surely a woman wouldn't make a fool of the same man twice with no purpose at all; his curiosity piqued now, he read the whole letter carefully.

Frédéric made out: "Misunderstanding . . . took a wrong turn . . . disillusioned . . . Poor children that we are! . . . Like two rivers that join together!" Etc.

The style was not the same as the courtesan's usual mode. What must have happened?

He held the pages in his hands for a long while. They were scented with iris; and there was something in the form of the letters, in the irregular spaces between the lines, that bothered him, something that was off, like an item of clothing in disarray.

Why don't I go over there? he thought, finally. But if Madame Arnoux were to find out? Oh, let her! So much the better! And I hope it makes her jealous! That'll be my revenge!

IV

The Marshal was ready, and she was waiting for him.

"That's so nice of you, really!" she said, fixing her pretty eyes on him, a gaze at once tender and vibrant.

When she had tied the ribbon on her hood, she sat on the divan and fell silent.

"Shall we go?" asked Frédéric.

She looked at the clock.

"Oh, no—not before one-thirty!" she said, as if she had settled on that limit to her indecision.

Then, when the hour sounded, "All right: *Andiamo, caro mio!*"[69]

She gave one last touch to her hair and left some orders for Delphine.

"Is madame returning for dinner?"

"But why should we? Let's eat out somewhere, maybe the Café Anglais, or someplace you'd like instead!"

"Fine!"

Her little dogs were yapping around her.

"We can take them along, can't we?"

Frédéric carried them himself into the carriage. It was a hired berlin with two post horses and a postilion; he had had his own servant take the seat behind. The Marshal seemed pleased with all these touches; then, once they were seated, she asked him if he'd been to visit the Arnoux house any time recently.

"Not for about a month," said Frédéric.

"I ran into him the day before yesterday; he was supposed to come by today. But he has all sorts of problems, another lawsuit, I don't know what all. What a strange man!"

"Yes! Very strange."

Frédéric added, offhandedly: "Speaking of him, do you ever see that other man . . . what was his name? The one who'd been a singer? Delmar?"

Her reply was curt: "No—that's over."

So, their breakup was real. Frédéric felt hope spring up.

They drove at walking pace through the Bréda district; it was Sunday and the streets were deserted, but, here and there, bourgeois faces could be seen behind windows. The carriage picked up speed; the sound of its wheels made passersby look up, the leather hood gleamed, the servant sat up more straight, and the two lapdogs sitting together on the cushions looked like two little muffs made of ermine. Frédéric settled into the rocking motion the springs made. The Marshal was smiling, turning her head to the right, then to the left.

Her white straw hat was trimmed with black lace. The hood of her burnouse fluttered in the wind; and she shaded herself from the sun with a lilac satin umbrella, pointed in the middle like a pagoda.

"What lovely little fingers!" said Frédéric, gently taking her free hand, the left, which was adorned with a gold curb-chain bracelet. "Say, this is pretty; where did you get it?"

"Oh, I've had it for ages," said the Marshal.

The young man made no reply to that piece of hypocrisy. He preferred to "take advantage of the moment." And holding her wrist, he pressed his lips to it, between her glove and her sleeve.

"Stop that! People will see us!"

"So what if they do?"

After the Place de la Concorde, they drove along the Quai de la Conférence and the Quai de Billy, where they noticed a cedar in a garden. Rosanette thought that Lebanon was in China; she laughed at her own ignorance and begged Frédéric to give her lessons in geography. Then, the Trocadero on their right, they crossed the Pont d'Iéna and finally came to a stop on the Champ de Mars, near other carriages that had already pulled up in front of the Hippodrome.

The grassy hillocks were packed with working-class people. Spectators could be seen on the balcony of the École Militaire; and the two pavilions outside the paddock, the two grandstands inside, and a third in front of the royal enclosure were teeming with a well-dressed crowd whose behavior showed the reverence they felt for this newly introduced sport. The public for horse racing in those days was more select, less vulgar, than it is today; this was the era of trouser-straps, velvet collars, and white gloves. The women, dressed in brightly colored, high-waisted dresses, sitting on the tiers of seats in the stands, looked like great bouquets of flowers, trimmed here and there with

the black suits of the men. But every eye was fixed on the famous Algerian Bou-Maza, who sat stiffly between two staff officers in one of the private stands.[70] The Jockey Club's private stand was populated by serious-looking men.

The true enthusiasts had found spots below, close to the track, which had been cordoned off by ropes strung alone lines of posts; inside the enormous oval formed by the track, vendors selling licorice-water shook their rattles, while other vendors sold programs, and some cigars; a great buzzing noise swelled up among the crowd, and municipal guards patrolled back and forth among them; a bell, hanging from a post covered with numbers, began to ring. Five horses appeared, and people went back to their seats.

But up in the sky bloomed some big, dark clouds, touching the tops of the elm trees across from them. Rosanette was afraid it would rain.

"I brought umbrellas," said Frédéric, "and everything we need to keep ourselves amused," he added, opening the trunk, where he'd put a basket of food.

"Ah, bravo! Clearly, we understand each other!"

"And we're going to understand each other even better, aren't we?"

"That could happen!" she said, blushing.

The jockeys, wearing silk jackets, were trying to get their horses in line, using both hands to rein them in. Someone dropped a red flag. Then all five, bending down over their horses' manes, took off. At first all five remained in a tight knot, but soon it lengthened, and then broke; the one wearing the yellow jacket almost fell; for a long time Filly and Tibi were running neck and neck; then Tom Thumb took the lead; but Clubstick, who had been running in the back of the pack from the beginning, now shot ahead of them all and came in first, beating Sir Charles by two lengths; this was a big surprise; people were shouting; they stamped their feet, and the wooden stands shook.

"This is fun!" said the Marshal. "I love you, darling!"

Now Frédéric was sure of his victory; what Rosanette just said confirmed it.

About a hundred yards away, a lady appeared in a victoria. She stuck her head out the window, then quickly retreated; this happened several times; Frédéric couldn't make out her face. But a suspicion took hold of him: the woman looked like Madame Arnoux. Impossible, surely? Why would she have come here?

He got out of the carriage, on the pretext of wanting to walk over to the paddock.

"That's not very gallant!" said Rosanette.

He paid no attention and kept on walking. The victoria turned around and moved off at a trot.

Just then Frédéric was stopped by Cisy.

"Hello, old friend! How've you been? Hussonnet's over there. Hang on—did you hear me?"

Frédéric tried to get rid of him and catch up with the victoria. The Marshal was waving for him to return to her. Cisy saw, and insisted on going over to say hello to her.

Since the mourning period for his grandmother had ended, he had begun to realize his fashionable ideal, to "show some style." A tartan waistcoat, short overcoat, big tassels on his shoes, his entrance ticket stuck in his hatband: nothing was lacking from what he called "chic," the chic of an Anglophile and musketeer. He started complaining about the Champ de Mars racetrack, with its wretched turf, then moved to the course at Chantilly, and some of the funny things that went on there, swore that he could drink twelve glasses of champagne during the twelve strokes of midnight, suggested that the Marshal lay money on it, gently caressed her two lapdogs; and leaning against the carriage door on his other elbow, he continued spewing inanities, sucking on the knob of his cane, his legs spread out and his behind protruding. Frédéric stood next to him, smoking, and scanning constantly for the victoria.

The bell rang, and Cisy disappeared—to the great relief of Rosanette, who said he was a bore.

The second race was not particularly interesting, nor was the third, apart from a man who had to be carried off on a stretcher. The fourth, though, was a different matter, as eight horses were competing for the Prix de la Ville.

The spectators in the stands clambered up on the benches. Others, standing up in their coaches, followed the jockeys through field glasses; they looked like so many red, yellow, white, and blue spots shooting past the crowd that lined the entire length of the Hippodrome. From a distance, the horses didn't seem to be moving all that fast; and at the far end of the Champ-de-Mars they even

seemed to slow down, moving ahead in a gliding motion, the horses' bellies seeming to touch the ground, their legs stretching straight out. But then, coming back at high speed, they grew larger; they cut the air as they passed; the ground trembled beneath them, and pebbles went flying; the wind blew into the jockeys' jackets, puffing them out like sails; whips cracked as they lashed their beasts toward the finish line. Numbers were taken down, and others went up; and amid the applause, the winning horse slowly made its way to the paddock, completely covered in sweat, knees rigid and head down while the rider, half dead in the saddle, clutched his sides.

A dispute delayed the start of the final race. The crowd grew bored and began drifting off. Groups of men stood talking at the foot of the stands. Their conversation was less than decent; some society women began to leave, scandalized at having been in proximity to less than respectable women.

Present also were some stars from the dance halls and actresses from the boulevard theaters—and the most celebrated among them were not the most beautiful. The aged Georgine Aubert, who one comedian had called the Louis XI of prostitution, wearing ghastly makeup and occasionally emitting a kind of laugh that sounded more like a groan, lay stretched out at full length in her barouche, covered with a fur as if it were the dead of winter. Madame de Remousset, recently made a topic of public gossip due to her lawsuit, was presiding like a queen from her coach, surrounded by a group of Americans; and Thérèse Bachelu, looking like a Gothic virgin as usual, with her twelve flounces occupied the whole interior of her coach, the apron of which had been replaced by a long flowerbox. The Marshal was jealous of all these celebrities; in order to attract some attention, she began making larger gestures and speaking louder.

Some gentlemen recognized her and waved. She waved back, telling Frédéric their names. They were all counts, viscounts, dukes, and marquis; he swelled up inwardly with pride, for everyone who looked his way seemed to express a certain respect for his good fortune.

Cisy looked no less pleased with himself, standing in a circle of older men. They were smiling behind their cravats, as if they were quietly making fun of him; finally he shook the hand of the eldest and walked over toward the Marshal.

She was putting on a show of being terribly hungry as she ate a slice of foie gras; Frédéric, obedient, imitated her, while balancing a bottle of wine on his knees.

The victoria reappeared: it was Madame Arnoux. She went extraordinarily pale.

"Give me some champagne!" Rosanette said.

And raising her glass as high as she could, she cried out: "Here's to all the respectable women, and especially my protector's wife!"

Laughter broke out all around them, and the victoria disappeared. Frédéric gripped her dress, tugging at her, almost furious. But Cisy was there, acting the same way he had before; and with complete self-confidence, he asked Rosanette to have dinner with him that evening.

"Impossible!" she said. "We're all going to the Café Anglais."

Frédéric said nothing, acting as if he hadn't heard; and Cisy walked away from the Marshal with a hangdog look.

While Cisy had been leaning against the coach's right-hand door, Hussonnet had come up to the left, and upon hearing the name Café Anglais: "Very nice place! Why don't we go there for a bite?"

"If you like," said Fréderic, slumped in a corner of the berlin and watching the victoria disappear into the distance, sensing that something irreparable had just happened, that he had lost his great love forever. And the other one was right there next to him, representing a joyful, easy love! But feeling exhausted, prey to conflicting desires, he no longer knew what he wanted, and he felt an infinite sadness, wishing he could die.

Loud sounds of footsteps and voices made him raise his head; a crowd of children had broken through the ropes and were rushing over to inspect the grandstands; people were leaving. A few drops of rain began falling. In the crush of carriage traffic, Hussonnet was lost.

"Well, so much the better!" said Frédéric.

"You'd rather be alone with me, eh?" said the Marshal, resting her hand on his.

Right then, with a flash of brass and steel, a superb landau passed right in front of them; it was pulled by four horses and driven by two jockeys in velvet jackets with gold fringes. Inside sat Madame Dambreuse and her husband side by side, with Martinon facing them; all three looked shocked.

They saw me! Frédéric thought.

Rosanette wanted to stop and watch the procession of carriages. Madame Arnoux could reappear. He shouted to the postilion: "Move on, damn it! Move on!"

And the berlin shot off toward the Champs-Élysées amid other coaches, barouches, britzkas, wurts, tandems, tilburys, dog-carts, leather-curtained delivery vans filled with workers singing cheerfully, *demi-fortunes* being driven prudently by family men.[71] Some victorias were so packed with passengers that a boy, sitting on other passengers' feet, let his own dangle off the side. Large broughams, upholstered in cloth, carried dozing dowagers; a fine high-stepping horse would sometimes trot past, towing a post-chaise as chic and simple as the suit of a dandy. But now the rain was growing heavier; out came the umbrellas, the parasols, the mackintoshes; people called out to each other: "Hello!—Everything going well enough?—Yes!—No!—We'll see you soon!" And one face after another flitted past rapidly, like images from a magic lantern. Frédéric and Rosanette were silent, sunk in a kind of torpor by the sight of so many wheels spinning all around them.

Sometimes the carriages, from hurrying too much, would all come to a stop at the same time, lining up right next to each other. At such times, the passengers in one would examine those in the other. From behind carriage doors emblazoned with aristocratic crests, indifferent eyes would peer down on the crowd; eyes ablaze with envy shone in the depths of the cabs; scornful smiles responded to haughty demeanors; gaping mouths expressed imbecilic marveling; and here and there someone strolling down the middle of the street would have to make a sudden backward leap in order to avoid a horseman galloping along between the carriages, trying to get out of the traffic. Then, suddenly, everything started to move again; coachmen slackened their reins and lowered their whips; impatient horses shook their bits, scattering froth around them; and the damp cruppers and harnesses gave off steam, shot through with the rays of the setting sun. Passing through the Arc de Triomphe, the sun darted reddish rays, making the wheel-hubs, the door handles, the tips of the shafts, and the saddle rings all gleam; and on either side of the wide avenue—which was like a river whose waves carried along manes, clothing, human heads—the trees glistened with rain, like two green walls. Where the blue of the sky appeared above, in patches, it looked as soft as satin.

Then Frédéric remembered those days, so distant already, when he'd yearned for the inexpressible happiness of finding himself one day riding in one of these coaches, with one of these women sitting next to him.

The rain had stopped. The pedestrians who had taken shelter under the pillars of the Garde-Meuble now came out again and got back on their way. The walkers in the Rue Royale came back out onto the boulevard. A group of tourists seated themselves on the steps in front of the Foreign Ministry.

Near the Chinese Baths, potholes in the road forced the berlin to slow its pace. A man in a chestnut-colored overcoat was walking along the edge of the pavement. A great shower of mud spurted up from under the springs, spattering his back. The man turned around, furious. Frédéric went pale; he recognized Deslauriers.

When they reached the Café Anglais, they dismissed the carriage. Rosanette went in ahead of him, while he paid the driver.

He caught up with her on the stairway, where she was chatting with a gentleman. Frédéric took her arm. But as they entered the corridor, a second man stopped her.

"You go on," she said; "I'll be with you in a minute."

He went into their private dining room by himself. Through the two open windows he could see people in the windows of the houses opposite. Large puddles drying on the asphalt below had the look of watered silk, and a magnolia blossoming on the edge of the balcony filled the room with its fragrance. The scent and the cool of the evening quieted his nerves; he slumped down on the red sofa under the mirror.

The Marshal returned; and as she kissed him on the forehead, "Are you upset about something, you poor boy?"

"I may be," he replied.

"Well, you're not the only one!"—which meant, Let's forget our problems and enjoy our time here together.

She put a flower petal between her lips, and held it out for him to nibble. The gesture, combining mercy with sensuality, touched Frédéric.

"Why do you make me unhappy?" he asked, thinking of Madame Arnoux.

"Me? I make you unhappy?"

She stood in front of him, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes half closed.

All his virtuous resolve, all his bitterness collapsed into an abyss of craven surrender. He replied, "Because you don't want to love me!" and pulled her down onto his lap.

She let him; he put both his arms around her; the rustling of her silk dress inflamed him.

"Where are they?" said the voice of Hussonnet out in the corridor.

The Marshal abruptly got up and hurried over to the other side of the room, her back to the door.

She ordered oysters; they all sat down at the table.

Hussonnet was not in the least amusing. Writing, as he had to do every day, on every sort of subject, reading so many newspapers, listening to so many discussions, having to come up with witty paradoxes to dazzle his readers—all this had blinded him to how feeble his own little fireworks really were. What had once been an easy, lighthearted kind of life had grown difficult, which kept him now in a continually anxious state; and his general inadequacy, which he refused to admit to himself, had turned him querulous and sarcastic. Talking about a new ballet, *Ozai,* he launched into an invective against dance, and from dancing into one on the Opéra, and then from the Opéra into one on the actors at the Théâtre Italiens, who were now all replaced by a troupe of Spaniards, "as if we weren't all sick to death of these Castiles!"[72] Frédéric, who had a romantic love for Spain, was shocked at this; and in order to change the subject, he asked about the Collège de France, from which Edgar Quinet and Mickiewicz had just been banned.[73] But Hussonnet, a great admirer of Monsieur de Maistre, declared himself firmly on the side of Authority and Spiritualism.[74] Yet at the same time he constantly questioned even the best-established facts, sneered at history, and wrangled over the most indisputable things, to the point of exclaiming, when someone mentioned geometry, "Oh, geometry—what a joke!" And among all these outbursts, he interlaced imitations of actors. Sainville was his chief model.[75]

All this nonsense was becoming too much for Frédéric. Making a sudden impatient movement, he accidentally kicked one of the lapdogs under the table.

The two of them started in yapping in the most annoying way.

"You should have taken them home!" he said curtly.

Rosanette didn't trust anyone to take them.

He turned to the Bohemian. "Look, Hussonnet, how about you doing it?"

"Oh yes, my dear friend, that would be so nice of you!"

Hussonnet didn't need any more persuasion, and off he went.

But how would she repay this favor? Frédéric didn't consider that. In fact he was beginning to find their being alone together at last pleasant, when a waiter entered.

"Madame, someone is asking for you."

"What? Again?"

"Still, I have to go see," said Rosanette.

He thirsted for her, needed her. This leaving the room seemed like a betrayal, almost an insult. What did she want, anyway? Wasn't it enough to have offended Madame Arnoux? Well, too bad for her too! Right now, he hated all women; and tears choked him, for his love had been misconstrued and his lust frustrated.

The Marshal came back in, accompanied by Cisy. "I invited monsieur to join us. Well done, don't you think?"

"Certainly! Of course!" said Frédéric as he gave Cisy a pained smile and invited him to have a seat.

The Marshal began running her finger down the menu, stopping at the unusual names of dishes. "Why don't we have rabbit *à la Richelieu,* and some pudding *à la d'Orléans*?"

"Oh no, not *d'Orléans*!" cried Cisy, who was a legitimist and thought this was a clever thing to say.

"Would you rather have turbot *à la Chambord*?" she asked. Being so deferential to Cisy disgusted Frédéric.

The Marshal settled on a plain steak, crayfish, truffles, a pineapple salad, and vanilla ices.

"After that, we'll see. That'll do. Ah—I forgot! Bring me some sausage, but with no garlic!"

She called the waiter "young man," tapped on her glass with her knife, and tossed bits of bread up toward the ceiling. She wanted to drink some burgundy right away.

"You don't have burgundy at the beginning of a meal," Frédéric said.

The vicomte insisted that sometimes people did.

"No. Never."

"Oh yes, I assure you!"

"There—you see?"

As she said this, the expression on her face implied: "This is a rich man; listen to him!"

Meanwhile, the door kept opening and closing, the waiters were shouting to each other, and someone was pounding out a waltz on an infernal piano in the next room. When racing came up, the conversation shifted to the two rival systems. Cisy argued for Baucher, and Frédéric for the Comte d'Aure[76]; Rosanette just shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, give it up, will you! He obviously knows more about it than you do."

She bit into a pomegranate, her elbow on the table; the flames in the candelabra in front of her fluttered in the wind; that white light seemed to penetrate her skin, giving it the luster of a pearl, and it made her eyelids look pink, her eyes gleam; the red of the fruit blended with the red of her lips, and her thin nostrils quivered; everything about her seemed insolent, drunken, and uncontrolled, and Frédéric was both exasperated and aflame with desire for her.

Then she calmly asked who owned that big coach with the servants in brown livery.

"That was the Comtesse Dambreuse," said Cisy.

"They're very rich, aren't they?"

"Oh yes, very! Although Madame Dambreuse herself used to be simply a Mademoiselle Boutron, daughter of a prefect, with a mediocre fortune."

Her husband, on the other hand, stood to inherit a lot from various relatives, which Cisy went on to enumerate; a frequent visitor to the Dambreuses, he knew the family history.

Frédéric, feeling irritable and wishing to contradict him, insisted he was wrong. He claimed that Madame Dambreuse's maiden name was de Boutron, which certified her nobility.

"What's the difference! I just wish I owned that carriage," said the Marshal, leaning back in her armchair.

The sleeve on her dress slipped back a little, revealing, on her left wrist, a bracelet with three opals.

Frédéric noticed it.

"Well, anyway—"

They all stopped and looked at each other, blushing.

The door was opened discreetly, and the brim of a hat appeared, followed by the profile of Hussonnet.

"Excuse me if I'm disturbing you lovebirds!"

But then he stopped, surprised to see that Cisy was there and had taken his place.

They brought another place setting; and since he was almost starving, he started picking food at random from what was left on the table, a bit of meat from one plate, some fruit from a basket, drinking with one hand and helping himself with the other, talking all the while about the mission he'd completed. He had taken the two doggies home. No news from there. He'd discovered the cook with a soldier, which was completely false, just a story he'd invented to get a reaction.

The Marshal took her hood from the peg. Frédéric hurried to ring for a waiter, calling out: "A cab!"

"I have my carriage here," said Cisy.

"But, monsieur!"

"Still, monsieur!"

They stood and stared at each other, both of them pale, both of them trembling.

Then the Marshal took Cisy's arm; and, pointing to the bohemian at the table: "Take care of him! He might choke himself. I'd hate for him to die after doing such a kindness to my little dogs."

The door closed behind them.

"Well?" asked Hussonnet.

"Well what?"

"I thought . . ."

"What did you think?"

"Weren't you two . . . ?"

He finished the phrase with a gesture.

"No! Not at all. Not at all!"

Hussonnet let the matter drop.

He'd had a purpose in mind in inviting himself to dinner. His paper—now no longer called *L'Art,* but *Le Flambard,*[77] with the motto "Gunners, to your cannons!"—was doing poorly, and he was thinking now of turning it into a weekly review, but on his own, without any help from Deslauriers. He mentioned the old plan in explaining the new one.

Frédéric, no doubt not comprehending, responded only in vague phrases. Hussonnet snatched up several cigars from the table, said "Goodbye, friend," and left.

Frédéric asked for the bill. It was long; the waiter, his napkin over his arm, waited for the money, when another waiter, a pale one who looked oddly like Martinon, came in.

"Sorry, but they forgot to add the cab to the bill."

"What cab?"

"The one the gentleman took with the two little dogs."

The waiter made a face suggesting sympathy with the poor young man. Frédéric felt like slapping him. He handed over the twenty francs change as a tip.

"Thank you, your lordship!" said the one with the napkin, making a low bow.

Frédéric spent the next day ruminating on his anger and his humiliation. He reproached himself for not having slapped Cisy. As for the Marshal, he swore never to see her again; there was no shortage of equally attractive women; and since possessing a woman like that took money, he would take the sum he'd received from the sale of the farm and play it on the stock market; that would make him rich, and he would be able to crush the Marshal and anyone else with his wealth. When evening came, he realized with a start that he hadn't thought about Madame Arnoux all day.

"Nothing wrong with that. After all, what's the point?"

The next day, at eight o'clock, Pellerin came to visit him. At first he did nothing but compliment Frédéric on the furniture and flatter him. Then, abruptly: "You were at the races on Sunday?"

"Yes, unfortunately."

The painter went on to declaim about the inferior anatomy of English horses, contrasting them with the great horses of Géricault and the Parthenon. "Was Rosanette with you?" And with that he began praising her.

Frédéric's coldness disconcerted him. He didn't know how to bring up the portrait.

His first plan had been to imitate Titian. But bit by bit he had become fascinated by the model's varied coloring; and he'd gone to work on it boldly, piling one brushstroke upon another, light upon light. Rosanette at first had been enchanted; then, her assignations with Delmar interrupted the sittings, which left Pellerin free to be dazzled by his own art. Then, when his admiration began to fade, he asked

himself whether the portrait didn't lack grandeur. He went back to look again at Titians, seeing the great gap there was between them and his own work, realized he'd been on the wrong track, and began to simplify his outlines. Then he tried to blend the tones of the head with those of the background; now the face was more solid, the shadows more alive, and the whole seemed stronger. Finally the Marshal had returned and had had the nerve to voice objections; the artist, of course, had persevered. After a furious rejection of her stupid ideas, he came to think that perhaps she had been right. That was the beginning of a period of doubt, agonizing trains of thought that resulted in stomach cramps, insomnia, fever, self-loathing; he'd had the courage to do some retouching, but he'd lost the heart for the task, and he felt the work was bad.

He complained to Frédéric, though, only about the work having been rejected by the Salon; then he reproached him for not having come to see the Marshal's portrait.

"To hell with the Marshal!"

That remark emboldened Pellerin.

"Can you believe it: that fool woman doesn't want the picture anymore!"

What he did not say, however, was that he had tried to sell it to her for a thousand écus. Now, the Marshal, never having been very concerned about who was going to pay for it, had never even mentioned it to Arnoux, preferring to extract money from him for more immediate needs.

"Well, how about approaching Arnoux?" said Frédéric.

She had already suggested that. But the former art dealer wanted nothing to do with the picture.

"He claims it belongs to Rosanette."

"Well, he's right."

"What! She sent me here, to you!" cried Pellerin.

If he had believed in the excellence of his own work, he might not have considered trying to sell it off. But money—if it were a lot of money—would be a real riposte to the critics, and a reaffirmation of himself. To get rid of him, Frédéric asked, politely, just how much he was asking.

The extravagance of the figure was so great that he replied, "Oh, no! No, no."

"But you're her lover, and you're the one who commissioned it!"

"Pardon me, but I was only an intermediary."

"But I can't just leave the thing on my hands!"

The artist was getting angry now.

"I never could have believed you'd be so stingy!"

"I didn't think you could be so greedy! Good day to you!"

Pellerin had just left when Sénécal came in.

This troubled Frédéric; he felt suddenly anxious. "What's the matter?"

Sénécal told his story.

"Saturday around nine, Madame Arnoux received a letter calling her back to Paris; at the time, there was nobody around to go to Creil and get her a carriage, so she wanted me to go myself. I said no, because that sort of thing isn't one of my official functions. She left, and returned Sunday night. Yesterday morning, Arnoux showed up at the factory. The Bordeaux girl started complaining. I don't know what the two of them said to each other, but he canceled her fine right in front of everybody. He and I exchanged some words. Long story short, he fired me, and here I am!"

Then, slowly spacing out his words, he said: "I have nothing to apologize for. I did my duty. But never mind. You're the cause of the whole thing."

"What?" cried Frédéric, fearing that Sénécal had guessed what had brought him there that day.

But Sénécal hadn't guessed anything. He replied, "What I mean is, if it hadn't been for you, I might have found a better job."

Frédéric felt somewhat guilty.

"Well, how can I help you now?"

Sénécal wanted to land a job, anywhere, some position.

"It's an easy thing for you. You know so many people, Monsieur Dambreuse for instance, or at least that's what I heard from Deslauriers."

Being reminded of Deslauriers was unpleasant for his friend. And he didn't dare return to the Dambreuses, after that encounter on the Champ de Mars. "I'm not on intimate enough terms over there to be recommending somebody."

The democrat accepted this refusal stoically, and then, after a moment of silence: "The whole thing came from that Bordeaux girl and your Madame Arnoux, I'm sure of it."

That "your" annihilated what little good will Frédéric still felt for the man. But out of civility he reached for the key to his desk.

Sénécal stopped him.

"Thanks, but no thanks."

Then, putting aside his own troubles, he started to speak about the state of the nation, the numerous *Croix d'honneur* decorations handed out at the king's birthday party, recent changes in the cabinet, the Drouillard and Bénier affairs (scandals of the moment)[78]; finally, he held forth against the middle classes and predicted a revolution.

A Japanese kris hanging on the wall attracted his attention. He took it down, tried handling it for a moment, and then tossed it onto the sofa with an expression of disgust.

"All right! I need to go now. I'm headed for Notre-Dame-de-Lorette."

"Really? What for?"

"Today's the memorial service for Godefroi Cavaignac.[79] That's one who never took a day off! But we haven't come to the end yet. . . . Who knows?"

Sénécal thrust out his hand soberly.

"We may never meet again! Goodbye!"

This farewell, twice repeated, together with the frown he cast on the Japanese dagger, gave Frédéric pause, though he quickly forgot all about it.

During that same week, the notary in Le Havre sent him the price of the farm, a hundred and seventy-four thousand francs. He divided it in two, putting one half into government securities and taking the other to a stockbroker to risk it on the market.

He ate in chic restaurants and went to the theaters, trying to keep himself distracted, when Hussonnet sent him a letter in which he gaily narrated that the Marshal had shown Cisy the door the day after the races. Frédéric was glad to hear of it, and he didn't spend any time thinking about why the bohemian had chosen to tell him about the incident.

As fate would have it, he bumped into Cisy three days later. That gentleman acted unperturbed, and even invited him to dinner the following Wednesday.

On the morning of that day, Frédéric received official notification that Monsieur Charles-Jean-Baptiste Oudry had, by court order, acquired the property located in Belleville that had belonged to

Monsieur Jacques Arnoux, and that he was prepared to pay the stated price of two hundred and twenty-three thousand francs. But the letter went on to say that since the sum of the mortgages outstanding on the property exceeded the purchase price, Frédéric's claim on the property was no longer valid.

All this was the result of failing to register the mortgages on time. Arnoux was supposed to have taken care of it, but he had forgotten. At first, Frédéric was enraged; later, when he had calmed down: "Well . . . so what? If it ends up saving him, so much the better. It's not going to kill me."

But while arranging the papers on his desk, he came across Hussonnet's letter and saw a PS that he had missed the first time around. The bohemian was asking for five thousand francs in order to get his periodical off the ground.

"The man will drive me mad!"

And he sent off a brusque note, categorically refusing. After that, he got dressed and went to the Maison d'Or.

Cisy introduced the other guests, beginning with the one who looked the most respectable, a fat man with white hair: "My godfather, the Marquis Gilbert des Aulnays. Monsieur Anselme de Forchambeaux," he went on (this was a young man, skinny and already bald); then, indicating a forty-something, unpretentious-looking man: "Joseph Boffreu, my cousin; and this is my old teacher, Monsieur Vezou," who looked half like a carter, half like a seminarist, with thick sideburns and a long frock coat buttoned at the bottom by a single button so that the garment looked like a shawl.

Cisy was still waiting for Baron de Comaing, "who might be coming, but it isn't certain." He stepped outside constantly, seeming uneasy about it; finally, at eight o'clock, they all went into a room that was beautifully lit and far too large for their number. Cisy had chosen the room for its pure ostentation.

On the middle of the table stood a silver centerpiece, filled with flowers and fruits; silver plates were spread out on the table in the old French style; serving dishes with spiced and salted hors-d'oeuvres were laid out like a border around the edges of the table; carafes of rosé wine stood at regular intervals; in front of every place setting stood five glasses of varying sizes, along with objects whose function was not entirely evident, a huge array of ingenious eating utensils—and for

the first course alone there were: a sturgeon's head doused in champagne, a York ham boiled in Tokay, thrushes au gratin, roast quail, vols-au-vent au Béchamel, a sauté of red-legged partridges, with, at either end, finely sliced potatoes with truffles. The room, hung in red damask, was lit by both a chandelier and candelabra. Four servants in black suits were stationed behind the Morocco leather armchairs. The guests exclaimed appreciatively, especially the teacher.

"Good heavens, our Amphitryon has outdone himself![80] It's just too beautiful."

"Do you think so?" asked Cisy. "Oh, come now!"

And then, having tasted the first spoonful, "Well! My dear des Aulnays, have you been to the Palais Royal to see *Père et Portier*?"[81]

"You know perfectly well I haven't got the time!" replied the marquis.

His mornings were devoted to a forestry course, his evenings to an agricultural circle, and afternoons to visiting factories manufacturing agricultural equipment. Living in Saintonge for three quarters of the year, he took advantage of his time in the capital to deepen his knowledge; and his broad-brimmed hat, which lay on a side table, was filled with pamphlets.

But Cisy, noticing that Monsieur de Forchambeaux wasn't drinking the wine, "Drink, man, drink! You're being pretty timid for your last meal as a bachelor!"

Hearing this, everyone turned and congratulated him.

"And the young lady," said the teacher, "is no doubt charming?"

"By God she is," said Cisy, "but that doesn't matter: getting married is just a stupid thing to do!"

"You're joking, my friend," said Monsieur des Aulnays, as a tear welled up in his eye, remembering his deceased wife.

And Forchambeaux said, over and over, with a wide grin, "It'll happen to you! It'll happen to you!"

Cisy insisted it would not. He much preferred enjoying himself, "being Regency." He wanted to learn *savate,* and drop into the lowest taverns in the city, like Prince Rodolphe in *The Mysteries of Paris.*[82] He pulled a clay pipe out of his pocket, spoke rudely to the waiters, drank too much, and in order to raise himself in the others' estimation, he criticized all the dishes. He even had the truffles sent back, and the teacher—who had been enjoying them greatly—said quietly, "They're not half as good as your grandmother's *oeufs à la neige.*"

Then he turned to his neighbor the farming enthusiast, who was saying he thought living in the country had many advantages, such as raising your daughters to have simple tastes. The teacher praised everything he said, toadying shamelessly to him, believing him to have great influence over his student, from whom he hoped to get hired as his steward.

Frédéric had come with anger in his heart over Cisy, but as he observed how endlessly stupid the man was, he softened somewhat. Still, his gestures, his facial expressions, everything about him kept reminding Frédéric of the dinner at the Café Anglais, and he began feeling bitter again; he was listening to some unflattering remarks about him that the cousin Joseph was quietly making, Joseph himself seeming a decent enough sort, without much money, fond of hunting and of playing the stock market. Several times, Cisy jokingly referred to him as "the thief." Then suddenly: "Ah! The baron!"

In came a fellow of about thirty, with something rough about his features and something athletic about his stride; his hat was cocked over one ear, and he sported a flower in his boutonniere. The vicomte clearly idolized him. He was thrilled at having got him to come, and his presence excited him to the point of trying to produce a pun, for he said, while a *coq de bruyère* was being served, "Here we have La Bruyère's very best character!"[83]

He proceeded to pester Monsieur de Comaing with a slew of questions about people that none of the others knew; then, as if suddenly struck by a thought: "But tell me: did you remember about me?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"You're not old enough, my boy! Impossible!"

Cisy had begged him to help get him into the baron's club. But the baron, not wanting to hurt his pride, said, "Oh, I almost forgot! Congratulations on your bet, my friend!"

"What bet?"

"The one you made that you'd be going back to that woman's place that night."

Frédéric felt as if he'd just been lashed by a whip. But seeing Cisy's evident discomfort calmed him at once.

The fact was that the Marshal had regretted the whole affair the following morning when her first lover, her man, Arnoux, showed up at her place. The two of them quickly made Cisy realize he was in the way, and they had shown him the door without much ceremony.

But now he seemed not to understand. The baron went on, "What's new with that pretty Rose these days? Does she still have those splendid legs?"—making it clear that the baron too knew her very well indeed.

Learning this was another annoyance for Frédéric.

"It's nothing to be embarrassed about," the baron continued. "She's a good one."

Cisy clicked his tongue.

"Well, not all *that* good."

"Ah!"

"Good God, I mean it! First of all, if you ask me, there's nothing special about her, and secondly, you can pick up women just like her any time because after all . . . she's for sale!"

"Not to everyone!" Frédéric interrupted angrily.

"He thinks he's different from everybody else!" said Cisy. "What a joke!"

A laugh went around the table.

Frédéric felt his heart pounding so hard he could barely breathe. He drank two glasses of water in a row.

But the baron had pleasant memories of Rosanette.

"Is she still with that Arnoux fellow?"

"I wouldn't know," said Cisy. "I don't know the gentleman."

But even so he suggested that the man was some sort of crook.

"Just a minute!" cried Frédéric.

"No, no, it's a fact! He's even been taken to court."

"That is not true!"

Frédéric began defending Arnoux. He personally vouched for his integrity, and ended up convincing himself of it, even inventing figures and proofs. The vicomte, increasingly embittered and drunk besides, persisted in his accusations, so much so that eventually Frédéric asked, "Are you trying to offend me, monsieur?" And he glared at him, his eyes glowing as much as his cigar.

"No, not at all! And I'll grant you that he does have one good thing in his favor—his wife."

"You know her?"

"Heavens yes! Sophie Arnoux—everybody's known that one!"[84]

"What did you say?"

Cisy, up on his feet now, stammered as he repeated: "Everybody's known her!"

"Shut your mouth! She's not like the kind of woman you go with!"

"No, and I'm proud of that!"

Frédéric flung his plate at his face.

It shot, quick as lightning, across the table, knocked over two bottles, demolished a fruit dish, broke into three pieces and ended up striking the vicomte in the stomach.

Everybody stood up to restrain Frédéric. He tried to fight them off, shouting at the top of his voice, out of control with rage; Monsieur des Aulnays was saying over and over: "Calm down! Please! My dear man!"

"This is terrible! Simply terrible!" exclaimed the teacher.

Forchambeaux, whose face had turned the color of the plums, was shaking; Joseph was laughing out loud; the waiters were sponging up the wine and picking up the debris from the floor; and the baron went over to shut the window, because the din could be heard out on the boulevard, even over the noise of the traffic.

Since everyone had begun talking at once as soon as the plate was hurled, it was impossible to learn the cause of the assault—was it about Arnoux, or Madame Arnoux, or Rosanette, or somebody else? The one thing they could all agree on was Frédéric's bestial behavior; and he positively refused to express the slightest regret.

Monsieur des Aulnays tried to calm him down, as did the cousin Joseph, the teacher, even Forchambeaux. The baron was busy comforting Cisy who, giving in to his nerves, was weeping. Frédéric, on the contrary, was growing angrier by the minute, and they could have been in the same situation all night long if it hadn't been for the baron bringing things to a conclusion: "The vicomte will have his seconds call on you tomorrow, monsieur."

"The time?"

"At noon, if that's agreeable to you."

"Perfectly, monsieur."

Frédéric, once he'd got outside, stopped to take deep breaths. He'd been holding his feelings in for far too long. And now he'd got them out at last; he felt proud, strong, intoxicated by an exhilarating surge of virility. But he needed two seconds. The first one he thought of was Regimbart; he headed straight for the tavern on the Rue Saint-Denis. The front window was shuttered, but he could see a light through the pane of glass above the door. The door opened, and bending down under the shutters, he went in.

A candle standing on the counter provided the only light in the room. All the stools were on the tables, their feet up in the air. The owner, his wife, and the waiter were all having their dinner in a corner near the kitchen—and Regimbart, wearing his hat, was sharing it with them, even crowding the waiter, who was forced to turn sideways to take a bite. Frédéric narrated a quick account of the affair and asked for his help. The Citizen at first said nothing; he gazed around the room as if he were thinking it over, and then finally said: "Yes, of course I will!"

His face beamed with a murderous grin when he learned that the opponent was an aristocrat.

"We'll have him marching to your tune in no time, don't worry! But first . . . it'll be with swords . . ."

"But I'm not sure that I have the right . . . ?"

"I'm telling you, it'll be swords!" the Citizen said brusquely. "Do you know how to shoot?"

"A little!"

"Ah, a little! That's what they all say! But they're all hot for fencing! What's the use of a fencing school! All right—listen to me. Keep your distance, and keep moving in circles, move back, move back! Nothing wrong with that. Tire him out! Then you go straight at him! But no tricks, none of that Fougère business![85] No! Just simple one-two thrusts, then disengage. Here, watch me. You turn your wrist like this, like you're opening a lock. Here, Monsieur Vauthier, let me use your cane! Ah—yes, this'll do."

He picked up the pole they used for lighting the gas, curved his left arm, bent his right, and began to thrust at the partition. He stamped his foot, getting himself more and more worked up, pretending to be in a fight, exclaiming: "Ah, so you think so? You want some more?" His enormous silhouette towered on the opposite wall, his hat seeming to touch the ceiling. The bar owner called out from time to time, "Bravo! Very good!" His wife likewise was rapt in admiration, though she remained silent; and Théodore, who had been a soldier, sat there in amazement, being a long-time admirer of Monsieur Regimbart.

Early the next morning, Frédéric hurried over to the shop where Dussardier worked. After making his way through a series of rooms filled with materials stacked on shelves or stretched out across tables, with, here and there, shawls draped over mushroom-shaped stands,

he found him behind a kind of grillwork cage, among the ledgers, standing up and writing on a lectern. The amiable young man immediately left his work and came with Frédéric.

Cisy's seconds arrived a little before noon. Frédéric thought good taste demanded he not be present while they conferred.

The baron and Monsieur Joseph declared that they would be satisfied with the simplest of apologies. But Regimbart, whose governing principle was never to give an inch, and who wished to defend the honor of Monsieur Arnoux (Frédéric hadn't told him anything beyond that), said that it was the vicomte who should be doing the apologizing. Monsieur de Comaing was outraged at this insolence. The Citizen wouldn't give in. All hopes of conciliation being dashed, the duel would go on.

Other difficulties presented themselves: the choice of arms, according to the rules, belonged to the offended party, Cisy. But Regimbart argued that since it was Cisy who called for the duel, Frédéric was the offended party. Cisy's seconds vigorously responded that a slap or blow was the most serious, the cruelest of all offenses. The Citizen quibbled: a thrown plate was not a slap. Finally they decided to let the military arbitrate, and they went off to consult officers at the nearest barracks.

They stopped at the barracks on the Quai d'Orsay. Monsieur de Comaing approached two captains and explained their dispute. But with the Citizen constantly interrupting, the captains couldn't understand anything. In short, they advised the group to write up a statement of the facts and they would make a decision based on that. The group then resorted to a café; and out of an abundance of discretion, they referred to Cisy as H and Frédéric as K.

When they returned to the barracks, the captains weren't there, and when they they eventually reappeared, they declared that the choice of weapons belonged definitely to Monsieur H. Then they all went to Cisy's place. Regimbart and Dussardier waited outside on the sidewalk.

The vicomte, hearing the solution, was so overcome by nerves that he had to ask them to repeat it several times; and when Monsieur de Comaing told him about Regimbart's demands, he only murmured, "So, so," being in fact very much inclined to submit to them. Then he let himself drop into an armchair and declared that he would not fight.

"What? What are you saying?" asked the Baron.

Then Cisy let loose an incoherent torrent of words. He wanted to fight with a musket, point blank, or with just one pistol.

"Or maybe we could put some arsenic in a glass, and toss a coin to see who drinks it. It's done sometimes. I've read about it."

The baron, not naturally a patient man, began to talk more roughly.

"Those gentlemen are waiting for your response. This is indecent! Pull yourself together! Make a decision! Do you want swords?"

The vicomte indicated "yes" by a nod of the head; and the duel was set for the following day at the Porte Maillot, at precisely seven in the morning.

Dussardier had to get back to his job. Regimbart went to tell Frédéric.

He had been left alone all day without any updates on what was happening; his impatience had become almost intolerable.

"All right—so much the better!" he exclaimed.

The Citizen was satisfied with his reaction.

"They demanded all sorts of apologies, can you believe it? Oh, all it would take would be a simple word. . . . But I told them what they could do with their simple word! Which is what you'd have wanted me to do, right?"

"Certainly," said Frédéric, while thinking that he really ought to have chosen someone else for his second.

Then, when he was alone, he said out loud to himself, several times: "I'm going to fight a duel! Imagine—I'm going to fight a duel! How strange!"

And as he paced up and down in his bedroom, he passed his mirror and noticed how pale he was.

"Does that mean I'm afraid?"

A flood of horrible anguish came over him, and he was struck with the idea that he might be afraid tomorrow at the duel.

"But what if I'm killed? That's how my father died. Yes—I'll be killed!"

And all of a sudden he could see his mother dressed in her black dress; a series of disconnected images ran through his head. His cowardice infuriated him. Then he felt a surge of bravado, a lust for blood. Now he wouldn't back down if he faced a whole battalion. When the fever had calmed, he rejoiced at realizing he felt firm and resolute. To distract himself, he went off to the Opéra, where a ballet was on.

He listened to the music, gazed at the dancers through opera glasses, and, during the intermission, drank a glass of punch. But when he returned home, the sight of his study and his furniture, which he may have been seeing for the very last time, made him feel suddenly weak.

He walked out into his garden. The stars were shining; he looked up at them. The idea of fighting for a woman's honor now seemed a grand thing to be doing, a noble thing. Then he went back in, went to bed, and slept peacefully.

Things were different with Cisy. After the Baron had left, Joseph stayed on to keep up Cisy's morale, and when the vicomte failed to respond to his attempts, "You know, old friend, if you'd rather not do it, I can go tell them."

Cisy didn't dare reply, "Yes, do it," but he wished his cousin would simply go do it on his own without his having to say anything.

He wished that Frédéric would die overnight from an apoplectic attack, or that perhaps a riot would break out and barricades would be thrown up, blocking all routes to the Bois de Boulogne, or that something would happen to prevent the seconds from showing up; because in that case, the duel would have to be called off. He felt like making his escape by getting on an express train to anywhere. He wished he knew some kind of drug that would make him appear to be dead without actually killing him. He went so far as to earnestly wish he would fall seriously ill.

In order to get some advice or help, he sent for Monsieur des Aulnays, but that good gentleman had gone back to Saintonge, having heard that one of his daughters had taken sick. That seemed like a bad omen to Cisy. Fortunately, Monsieur Vezou, his old teacher, came to see him. He opened up to him.

"What should I do? My God! What should I do?"

"Well, if it were me, Monsieur le Comte, I'd hire some thug from the market to beat the daylights out of him."

"But he'd know who was behind it!" said Cisy. He emitted groans from time to time, and then: "Anyway, does anyone have the right to fight a duel?"

"Oh, these duels are a relic from barbaric times! What can you do?"

To be friendly, the teacher invited himself to dinner. His student couldn't eat anything, and after the meal he felt he had to take a walk.

As they passed a church: "Do you think we might stop in . . . just to have a look?"

Monsieur Vezou thought that was a fine idea, and he even offered him the holy water.

It was May, Mary's month; the altar was heaped with flowers, voices were singing, the organ booming. But he found it impossible to pray, for the ritual pomp reminded him of funerals; he could almost hear the *De Profundis* being chanted.

"Let's get out of here! I'm not feeling well."

They stayed up all night playing cards. The vicomte made himself lose, thinking that would somehow keep bad luck away, and Monsieur Vezou took full advantage of the situation. Finally, at dawn, a worn-out Cisy let his head drop onto the table; he slept, and dreamed unpleasant dreams.

But if courage is defined as trying to overcome our weaknesses, the vicomte was courageous, for at the sight of his seconds, when they came to pick him up, he stiffened himself, his vanity telling him that backing down now would be the end of him. Monsieur de Comaing complimented him on how well he looked.

But on the way, the swaying of the cab and the heat of the morning sun were too much for him. All his energy disappeared. He couldn't even tell where they were.

The baron amused himself by making it worse for him, talking about "the corpse" and how they would manage to sneak it back into town. Joseph joined in; both of them, thinking the whole affair ridiculous, were convinced the duel would be called off.

Cisy's head was sunk down on his chest; he brought it up slowly and noted that they hadn't arranged to bring a doctor along.

"No need for one," said the baron.

"Then there's no danger?"

Joseph replied, in a grave tone: "Let's hope not!"

Nobody in the carriage said another word after that.

At 7:10 they arrived at the Porte Maillot. Frédéric and his seconds were there, all three of them dressed in black. Regimbart was wearing, instead of a cravat, a horse-hair collar like a soldier; and he was carrying a kind of long violin case, specially made for occasions like this. They bowed to each other coldly, and then they all walked off into the Bois de Boulogne, following the Route de Madrid, in search of a suitable spot.

Regimbart said to Frédéric, who was walking between him and Dussardier: "Feeling a little afraid? If you need anything, just ask—I

know all about it. It's perfectly natural to feel afraid." Then he added, more quietly, "Don't smoke now; it weakens you."

Frédéric threw his cigar aside and continued walking with a firm step. The vicomte followed behind, leaning on the arms of his two seconds.

They encountered very few other people. The sky was blue, and here and there they could hear the sounds of rabbits scampering in the underbrush. At a bend in the path, a woman in a kerchief was talking to a man in a smock, and on the main avenue, lined with chestnut trees, grooms in linen jackets were exercising their horses. Cisy was recalling those better days when he rode along on his sorrel, his monocle in his eye, trotting past carriage doors; the memories only made his anxiety worse; he was burning with an intolerable thirst; the buzzing of the flies seemed to blend with the throbbing in his arteries; his feet sank into the sand; it seemed to him that they had been walking for an eternity.

The seconds, without stopping, continued to scan both sides of the path. They deliberated whether to go on to the Croix Catelan, or to stop at the walls of the Bagatelle. Finally, they turned off to the right and came to a halt in a kind of clearing among pine trees.

They chose the place because it offered both parties level ground. They marked off the spots where the two adversaries would stand. Then Regimbart opened his case. Its interior was red padded leather, and it contained four splendid swords with grooved blades and filigree hilts. A bright ray of sunlight passed through the branches and illuminated them; and Cisy thought they looked like silver vipers in a sea of blood.

The Citizen demonstrated that the swords were of equal length; he took a third one for himself, to separate the combatants if that proved to be necessary. Monsieur de Comaing held a cane. There was a silent pause while they all looked at each other. Every face looked either frightened or cruel.

Frédéric had removed his coat and waistcoat. Joseph helped Cisy do the same; when his cravat was removed, a religious medal could be seen on his neck. Regimbart smiled pityingly at this.

Then Monsieur de Comaing (in order to give Frédéric an extra moment of reflection) raised some quibbles. He asserted the right to wear a glove, and the right to take hold of the opponent's sword with the left hand. Regimbart, who wanted to get started, did not argue.

Then the baron turned to Frédéric: "Everything depends on you, monsieur! There's no dishonor in admitting to one's faults."

Dussardier nodded in approval. The Citizen grew indignant.

"Do you think we came here to play games, damn it? *En garde!*"

The adversaries faced each other, their seconds beside them. Regimbart cried out the signal: "Go!"

Cisy went frighteningly pale. The tip of his sword was quivering like the tip of a riding crop. His head tilted back, his arms spread out wide, and he fell flat on his back in a faint. Joseph got him sitting up and, holding the smelling salts to his nose, shook him violently. The vicomte opened his eyes and then, like a madman, abruptly leaped up and grabbed his sword. Frédéric was still holding his; and he stood waiting for him, staring at him intently, his hand raised.

"Stop! Stop!" cried a voice from the road, accompanied by the sound of galloping; a cab came bursting into the clearing, breaking right through the branches. A man was leaning out the window, waving a white handkerchief and repeatedly shouting, "Stop! Stop!"

Monsieur de Comaing, fearing it was the police, raised his cane.

"That's enough! The vicomte is bleeding!"

"I am?" said Cisy.

And in fact he was: when he fell down, he had scraped his left thumb.

"But that's because he fell," the Citizen pointed out.

The baron pretended not to hear.

Arnoux came bounding out of the cab.

"Am I too late? No! Thanks be to God!"

He rushed up and took Frédéric in his arms, felt him carefully all over, and covered his face in kisses.

"I know why you're doing this—you wanted to defend the honor of your old friend! That's wonderful, just wonderful! I'll never forget this! How good you are! Oh, my dear boy!"

He gazed at him and burst into tears, all the while grinning with happiness. The baron turned to Joseph.

"I think you and I aren't needed in this little family scene. It's all over now, isn't it, gentlemen? Here, vicomte—put your arm in a sling. You can use my scarf." Then he added, in an imperious tone, "Come now! No hard feelings! It's only right!"

The two combatants exchanged a feeble handshake. The vicomte, Monsieur de Comaing, and Joseph all walked off in one direction, while Frédéric and his friends went the other.

Since the Restaurant de Madrid was close, Arnoux suggested they all go there and have a glass of beer.

"We could even have breakfast," said Regimbart.

But since Dussardier didn't dare take the time, they simply had a drink in the garden. They all felt that serenity that comes from a happy outcome. The Citizen, however, was still annoyed that the duel was interrupted before it really got started.

Arnoux had heard about it from a friend of Regimbart named Compain; and being extremely moved by it, believing he was the cause, he had impulsively hurried over to prevent it. He begged Frédéric to tell him all the details. Frédéric, touched by these proofs of his affection, was loath to add to his illusion. "Please, let's not talk about it anymore!"

Arnoux thought this reserve was highly discreet. Then, with his customary flightiness, he dropped the subject and turned to the Citizen. "So, what's new?"

And they started talking about bank drafts and dates of maturation. To be more comfortable, the pair moved to another table and whispered together.

Frédéric caught a few words: "You'll underwrite for me. . . . Yes, but only you, you understand. . . . I finally settled for three hundred! . . . Not a bad commission, I'd say!" In short, it was evident that Arnoux was involved in quite a few shady deals with the Citizen.

Frédéric thought of reminding him about the fifteen thousand francs. But this morning's adventure had made it impossible to say anything that could sound like a rebuke. Anyway, he was exhausted. This wasn't the place for it. He'd bring it up another day.

Arnoux, sitting in the shade of a privet bush, was smoking away with the greatest of cheer. He looked up at the doors of the private rooms that opened onto the garden and said he'd been up there many a time.

"Not alone, I'm guessing?" said the Citizen.

"Me? Me?"

"What a naughty boy you are! And you a married man!"

"Well, what about yourself?" Arnoux replied. He added, with an indulgent smile: "I'd lay money that this one's got a private room somewhere, where he entertains his girls!"

The Citizen confessed that it was true by a simple lifting of his eyebrows. Then the two gentlemen discussed their personal tastes:

Arnoux liked them young, preferably working-class girls; Regimbart hated the "stuck-up" type, and preferred the simple ones. The conclusion, drawn by the porcelain merchant, was that you shouldn't take women seriously.

And yet he loves his wife, Frédéric thought as he made his way back home; he decided that Arnoux was dishonest, a hypocrite, and he resented the duel, as if he really had risked his life for him. But he did feel grateful for Dussardier's devoted support; the clerk, upon his encouragement, began coming over to see Frédéric every day.

Frédéric lent him books: Thiers, Dulaure, Barante, Lamartine's *Les Girondins.*[86] The good fellow was always receptive, and he accepted Frédéric's opinions as if they were those of a master.

One evening he arrived with panic on his face.

That morning, on the street, he had run into a man rushing along breathlessly; when the man recognized him as a friend of Sénécal's, he said, "They've arrested him! I've got to hide!"

And it was true. Dussardier spent the day learning whatever he could. Sénécal was locked up, suspected of being involved in a political conspiracy.

Son of a foreman in Lyons, student of a Chalier disciple, he had joined the Société des Familles as soon as he got to Paris.[87] His doings were observed; the police kept him under surveillance. He fought in the insurrection of May 1839 and since then had tried to keep a low profile, but he had become increasingly fanatical, praising Alibaud and blending his own personal grievances with those of the people against the monarchy; he woke up every morning hoping to see a revolution starting which would, in a couple of weeks or maybe a month, change the whole world. Finally, sickened at his colleagues' weakness of will, infuriated by all the obstacles in the way of his dreams, in despair at the state of the nation, he used his skills as a chemist to get involved in a bombing plot; and he had been caught carrying gunpowder for a bomb to be set off in Montmartre in a supreme attempt to establish a Republic.

Dussardier was just as enthusiastic about the Republic because, he believed, it represented emancipation and universal happiness. One day—he was then fifteen—in front of a grocer's on the Rue Trasnonain,[88] he'd seen some soldiers whose bayonets were still red with blood, and with mats of hair and blood on their rifle butts; ever

since then, government infuriated him as the very incarnation of injustice. He tended to see no difference between a policeman and a murderer; a police spy, as far as he was concerned, was no better than a parricide. All the evil all across the earth came from Power, he believed, naïvely; and he hated Power with a deep, undying hatred; it filled his heart, and it shaped and refined his personality. Sénécal's passionate rants dazzled him. So even if he was guilty, and even if his plot was an ugly one—none of that mattered! The minute Sénécal became the victim of Power was the minute Dussardier needed to come to his aid.

"The Peers will condemn him, no doubt about it! Then he'll be taken in a police van, like a criminal, and they'll lock him up in Mont St. Michel, where the government takes them to die! Austen went mad! Steuben was killed! To get Barbès into a cell, they dragged him by the hair and the legs! They trampled his body, and let his head bump on every step on the stairs![89] What an obscenity! Monsters!"

He started sobbing with rage, pacing up and down the room as if in the grip of utter anguish.

"We've got to do something! Let's think! I don't know what to do! What if we tried to break him out? While they're transferring him to the Luxembourg, we could ambush the escort in the corridor![90] A dozen good men can do a lot!"

His eyes were ablaze, causing Frédéric to shudder.

Sénécal seemed greater now, more important than he had ever been. He recalled his sufferings, the austere life he led; without feeling quite the level of enthusiasm that Dussardier did, he nonetheless felt the admiration one feels for a man who sacrifices himself for an idea. He reflected that if he had tried to help Sénécal, he might not have come to this; and the two friends tried to think of anything they could do to save him.

They found it was impossible to get to him.

Frédéric started searching for any news about his fate in the papers, and for three weeks he was a constant visitor in the reading rooms.

One day he came across several issues of *Le Flambard.* The lead article, without fail, was an attack on some famous man. This was followed by bits of society news, some gossip. Then came some ridicule aimed at the Odéon, the town of Carpentras,[91] fish farming, and prisoners awaiting execution, if there were any at the moment. The

sinking of a steamboat provided fodder for a whole year's worth of humor. The third column was devoted to a chronicle of the arts, and here would be found advice and anecdotes, ads for tailors, reports on parties and auction sales, and critical analyses of books, giving as much attention to a volume of poetry as to a pair of boots. The only serious section of the paper was criticism of the little theaters, and even here one found two or three managers being frenziedly attacked, and the interests of Art invoked to critique a stage set at the Funambules or a beautiful actress at the Délassements.

Frédéric was about to toss the paper aside when his eye was caught by an article entitled "A Hen and Three Roosters." This turned out to be the story of his duel, narrated in a spirited, bawdy style. He could easily recognize himself in the story, for it kept referring to him by the would-be witty epithet "a young man from Sens, who didn't have any."[92] It depicted him as a dimwitted country boy who was foolish enough to try and mix with the aristocracy. The vicomte, on the other hand, was the hero, first at the dinner, where he forced his way in, and then in regard to the wager, because he'd managed to go off with the girl, and then at the duel itself, where he behaved like a true gentleman. Frédéric's bravery was not exactly denied, but the story made it clear that he only survived because a third party, his protector, arrived on the scene just in time. The whole thing came to a conclusion with this, suggesting that further revelations might be forthcoming: "What's the basis for this affection between the two men? Interesting problem! And, as Don Bazile might say, just who's fooling whom?"[93]

No doubt about it: this was Hussonnet's vengeance on Frédéric for being refused the five thousand francs.

What to do? If he were to demand satisfaction, the Bohemian would just claim he had nothing to do with it, and he'd be no better off. The best option was just to swallow it in silence. And nobody read *Le Flambard* anyway.

When he left the reading room, he saw a group of people standing in front of an art dealer's window. They were all looking at a portrait of a woman, below which was written this caption, in black letters: "Mademoiselle Rose-Annette Bron, property of Monsieur Frédéric Moreau of Nogent."

It was her all right—more or less—looking out at the viewer, her breasts bared, her hair hanging down loosely, holding in her hands

a red velvet purse; behind her a peacock was poking its beak over her shoulder while fanning its tail feathers out against a wall.

Pellerin had arranged this exhibition to force Frédéric to pay up, convinced that he, the painter, was so famous that all of Paris would stand up and support him in his difficult financial straits.

Was it all a conspiracy? Had the painter and the journalist planned their assaults together?

His duel had done him no good. He'd just become ridiculous, and the whole world was laughing at him.

Three days later, toward the end of June, his Nord shares had climbed fifteen francs, and since he'd bought two thousand of them the previous month, he found he'd made a profit of thirty thousand francs. This little piece of good luck restored his confidence. He told himself that he didn't need anybody, and that all his problems stemmed from being timid and indecisive. He should have been more forceful with the Marshal, should have refused Hussonnet the first time he made the request, and shouldn't have let himself get mixed up with Pellerin; and to prove to himself that he was perfectly untroubled, he went off to one of Madame Dambreuse's regular soirées.

In the foyer he ran into Martinon, who was arriving at the same time. Martinon stopped and looked at him.

"You're coming here? *You?*" he said as if surprised, and almost as if displeased.

"Why wouldn't I?"

Wondering what that meant, Frédéric proceeded into the drawing room.

The lighting was dim, despite the lamps lit in the corners, for the three windows, side by side, were wide open, looking like three large black rectangles. Flower stands nearly six feet tall stood between the pictures on the walls, and a silver teapot and a samovar were reflected in a distant mirror. There was a murmur of discreet voices. Shoes squeaked when they moved over the carpet.

He could just make out black suits, then a round table illuminated by a shaded lamp, seven or eight women in summer dresses, and, a little farther on, Madame Dambreuse, in a rocking chair. Her gown, of lilac taffeta, had slashed sleeves revealing a puffed muslin lining, the soft shades of the material harmonizing with those of her hair; and her body leaned back a little as the tip of her toe rested on

a cushion—serene and calm as an infinitely delicate work of art, as a carefully cultivated flower.

Monsieur Dambreuse and an elderly man with white hair were pacing together the whole length of the room. Some men, here and there, were sitting on the edges of little divans, chatting together; others were standing in a circle in the middle of the room.

They were talking about votes, amendments, amendments to amendments, the speech by Monsieur Grandin, and the reply by Monsieur Benoist. But the Third Party really had gone too far![94] The center-left needed to remember where it came from! The ministry had suffered serious setbacks. But the reassuring thing was that there were no obvious successors in view as yet. In short, the situation was exactly analogous to that of 1834.

Since all this bored Frédéric, he walked over to the women. Martinon was standing there, his hat under his arm, posed in partial profile so elegantly that he could have been a piece of Sèvres porcelain. Martinon picked up a copy of the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* which lay on the table between an *Imitation of Christ* and an *Almanac de Gotha,*[95] and continued loftily criticizing an illustrious poet, also mentioning that he planned to attend the St. Francis Xavier lectures, and that he had a sore throat, for which he took the occasional lozenge; he moved on to music, and then to small talk. Mademoiselle Cécile, Monsieur Dambreuse's niece, sat embroidering a pair of cuffs and surreptitiously observing him with her pale blue eyes; and Miss John, the governess with the snub nose, had dropped her tapestry work; both of them seemed to be exclaiming inwardly: "How handsome he is!"

Madame Dambreuse turned to Martinon. "Get my fan, will you, from the console over there. No, not that one, the other one!"

She stood up and the two of them met face to face as he was coming back; she said something emphatic to him, some kind of reproach, apparently, to judge by the way his facial expression changed; Martinon tried to smile; then he went over and joined the group of serious-looking men. Madame Dambreuse came back to her place, and leaning on the arm of her chair, said to Frédéric: "I met someone, the day before yesterday, who spoke about you, a Monsieur de Cisy. You know him, I believe?"

"Yes . . . slightly."

All of a sudden Madame Dambreuse called out: "Duchess! How good to see you!"

She hurried over to the door to meet an elderly little woman who wore a pale brown taffeta gown and a guipure lace bonnet with long strings. Daughter of a companion in exile of the Comte d'Artois,[96] and the widow of a marshal in the Empire who was made a Peer in 1830, she had strong connections to both the previous court and the present one, and she could wield powerful influence. All the men who were standing and talking moved aside for her, then resumed their conversation. By now they were onto the topic of poverty, the accounts of which were greatly exaggerated, at least as these gentlemen saw it.

"Still," Martinon said, "poverty does exist, and we must admit it! But the cure for it is neither Science nor Government. No, it's purely an individual matter. When the lower classes finally decide to abandon their vices, they'll be able to meet their needs. When the people are more moral, they'll be less poor!"

As Monsieur Dambreuse saw it, there could be no progress without a great abundance of capital. Thus, the only possible method was to place, "as, by the way, the Saint-Simonians always said—Good lord, give them their due; they got this right—to place Progress in the hands of the ones who are most capable of increasing the national wealth!" Then, gradually, they moved on to the great industrial ventures, the railroads, the coal mines. Monsieur Dambreuse said quietly to Frédéric, "You never came to see me about that little business of ours."

Frédéric claimed to have been ill; but sensing that the excuse was a little thin, he added, "In fact, I needed my money just then."

"To purchase a coach?" asked Madame Dambreuse, who was passing close by him, a cup of tea in her hand; and she looked back at him over her shoulder as she moved away.

She believed he was Rosanette's lover; the allusion was perfectly clear. And now Frédéric thought he could see all the women looking at him and whispering. To find out what they were thinking, he went over to their side of the room once more.

On the other side of the table, Martinon stood next to Mademoiselle Cécile as he flipped through an album. It was a collection of lithographs representing Spanish costumes. He was reading the captions out loud: "A woman of Seville. A gardener of Valencia. A picador

from Andalusia"; and when he came to the bottom of the page, he continued, without any pause, "Jacques Arnoux, publisher. One of your friends, eh?"

"Yes, he is," said Frédéric, wounded by his tone.

Madame Dambreuse picked up the thread. "And didn't you come by one morning . . . for . . . something about a house, I believe? Yes, it was a house belonging to his wife." This clearly signified "she's your mistress."

He reddened up to his ears; and Monsieur Dambreuse, who had come up just then, added, "You seem to take quite an interest in them."

This last comment put an end to all Frédéric's composure. They could see that he was discomfited, he thought, and it was only going to confirm their suspicions. But then Monsieur Dambreuse stepped up closer to him and asked, in a serious tone, "You aren't doing business with him, I hope?"

He shook his head repeatedly, without quite understanding what the financier intended by asking the question—which was to warn him off.

He felt like leaving. The fear of looking cowardly kept him from doing it. A servant was picking up the tea cups; Madame Dambreuse was talking with a diplomat in a blue coat; two girls with their heads together were looking at a ring; the others were seated in a semicircle in their armchairs; their pale faces—some framed by dark hair, some by blond—were animated; not one of them was paying any attention to him. Frédéric turned on his heels; by a long, zigzagging route he had just about reached the door when, passing a console table, he saw a newspaper, folded and lying there between a Chinese vase and the paneling. He pulled it toward him just a little and read there: *Le Flambard.*

Who could have brought it here? Cisy! Nobody else. But what did it matter! They were going to believe, they did believe that article. Why this dogged persecution? An ironic silence seemed to surround him. He felt as though lost in a desert. But then he heard Martinon's voice: "Speaking of Arnoux, I read that they arrested one of his employees in that incendiary bomb case, someone named Sénécal. It couldn't be the same one?"

"The same," said Frédéric.

Martinon exclaimed at the top of his voice, repeatedly: "What? Our Sénécal! Our Sénécal!"

They began to ask him about the plot. Being connected to the prosecutor's office, he had to know the details.

He had to admit that he knew nothing. Anyway, he barely knew the individual in question, had only seen him two or three times, but could say with certainty that he was a bad character. Frédéric protested indignantly: "Not at all! He's a thoroughly decent man!"

"Decent! Monsieur, one is no longer decent when one becomes a conspirator," said a landowner.

Most of the men there had served under at least four different governments, and they would have sold out France or even the whole human race to protect their own fortunes, to spare themselves the least discomfort or difficulty, or simply out of sheer baseness, out of their instinctive worship of Power. They all declared that political crimes were inexcusable. If pardon were necessary, it would be better to give it to crimes committed out of poverty and want! It wasn't long before somebody brought up the usual example of the impoverished father stealing the usual loaf of bread from the usual baker.

One administrator even exclaimed: "Monsieur, if I learned that my own father were involved in a conspiracy, I would denounce him!"

Frédéric argued that we have the right to resistance; and remembering some phrases that Deslauriers had used, he cited Desolmes, Blackstone, the British bill of rights, and Article 2 of the 1791 Constitution.[97] In fact Napoleon had been dethroned by virtue of that right; it was invoked again, at the head of the Charter of 1830.

"In any case, when the sovereign fails to live up to his end of the contract, justice demands that he be overthrown."

"But that's abominable!" cried the wife of a prefect.

All the others were silent, vaguely horrified, as if they could already hear the bullets whistling around them. Madame Dambreuse rocked in her chair, listening and smiling.

An industrialist who had at one time been a *carbonaro*[98] tried to argue Frédéric into seeing that the Orléans were a fine family; of course, there had been some abuses. . . .

"And so?"

"But there's not need to stir up those things, monsieur! If you only knew how much damage all these outcries from the Opposition do to business!"

"I couldn't care less about business!" said Frédéric.

The corruption of all these old men infuriated Frédéric; and carried away by that courage that sometimes comes to even the most timid, he inveighed against financiers, politicians, the government, the king; he defended the Arabs, and spouted all sorts of extreme foolishness. Some of the men listening smiled ironically and urged him on: "Go on! Dig yourself in deeper!" Others muttered, "Good God, he must be out of his mind!" Finally, he thought it best to call a halt to it and leave. On his way out, Monsieur Dambreuse came up to him and, alluding to the post of secretary, said, "Nothing's been settled yet, but don't take too long with your decision!"

And Madame Dambreuse called out: "We'll see you again soon, I hope."

Frédéric took their last words as sarcasm. He promised himself that he'd never visit that house again, never again see any of those people. He believed he had wounded them, but he failed to appreciate the enormous depths of indifference that characterizes people at this level in society! He felt especially indignant about the women. Not one of them had stood up for him or even given him a glance of support. He resented them because he'd been unable to move them. As for Madame Dambreuse, he found in her a mix of languor and rigidity; he couldn't pin her down. Did she have a lover? And who? The diplomat, or someone else? Maybe Martinon? No, impossible! And yet he felt somehow jealous of him, and somehow ill-disposed to her.

Dussardier, who had come to his place that evening as usual, was waiting for him. Frédéric's heart was overflowing; he opened up to Dussardier, letting out all his grievances, and even though they were somewhat vague and hard to understand, they saddened the good young clerk; Frédéric even admitted his loneliness. Dussardier, after a moment's hesitation, suggested they go visit Deslauriers.

Hearing the lawyer's name aroused in Frédéric an intense desire to see him again. His feeling of intellectual isolation had been profound, and Dussardier's company was no help in that regard. He told him to go ahead and arrange a meeting in any way he liked.

Deslauriers likewise had felt a gap in his life since the two had quarreled. He didn't hesitate at all when they made friendly advances to him.

The two embraced when they met, but their conversation kept to indifferent matters.

The reserve that Deslauriers showed touched Frédéric; and as a kind of reparation, he told him the next day about the loss of the fifteen thousand francs, without mentioning that the fifteen thousand had originally been intended for him. But the lawyer could see the truth. Frédéric's misadventure confirmed him in his prejudice against Arnoux, and this dispelled all his bitterness; he made no further mention of the broken promise.

Frédéric misread his silence, thinking that he had forgotten about it. A few days later, he asked if there was any legal method for getting his money back.

They could look into the previous mortgages, sue Arnoux for fraudulent misrepresentation, or even start proceedings against his wife.

"No, no! Not against her!" cried Frédéric; and then, in answering the lawyer's questions, he told the whole truth.

Deslauriers was convinced he was holding something back, probably out of discretion. Frédéric's lack of trust wounded him.

They remained, however, as close as ever, and in fact they did get a great deal of pleasure out of being with each other—so much so that Dussardier's presence was becoming a problem. They gradually shook him off, pleading other appointments they had to keep. There are men whose sole mission in life is to act as go-betweens for others; they're like bridges—you cross them, and then move on.

Frédéric kept no secrets from his old friend. He told him all about the coal company, and the offer Monsieur Dambreuse had made.

"What an odd offer! A position like that would require a person to have a pretty solid legal background."

"Well, maybe you could help me," replied Frédéric.

"Yes . . . maybe so—well, of course!"

That same week, Frédéric showed him a letter from his mother.

She accused herself of having misjudged Monsieur Roque, who had given her a fully satisfactory explanation of his behavior. She went on to the subject of Frédéric's financial future, and she raised the possibility that he might consider marrying Louise one day.

"Now, that might not be a bad idea!" said Deslauriers.

Frédéric rejected the idea out of hand; and anyway old Roque was an old crook. That didn't matter, said the lawyer.

At the end of July, there was an inexplicable drop in the Nord shares. Frédéric hadn't sold his; all at once, he lost sixty thousand

francs. His income was noticeably diminished. He would have to cut back on expenses, or take a job, or enter into a lucrative marriage.

Deslauriers started talking about Mademoiselle Roque. Anyway, there'd be nothing to stop him from going down and having a look at things for himself. Frédéric was feeling fatigued; going back to the country and his mother's house might be just what he needed. He departed.

The sight of Nogent's streets in the moonlight brought back old memories; and he felt a kind of unease, the kind a person feels upon returning home from a long journey.

All his mother's usual guests were there: Messieurs Gamblin, Heudras and Chambrion, the Lebrun family, "the young Auger girls"; added to them were old Roque and, sitting across from Madame Moreau at a card table, Mademoiselle Louise. She was a woman now. She stood up and cried out, and everyone hurried over to her. She remained standing, motionless; light from the four silver candelabra on the table made her skin look paler. When she sat back down and resumed playing, her hands were shaking. This was enormously flattering to Frédéric, whose pride had been quite battered of late; he said to himself, "So, you love me, don't you!" And as if to avenge himself for all the slights he'd suffered, he began to act like a haughty Parisian, a great man-about-town, telling anecdotes about the theaters, people in high society—things he'd picked up from gossip columns in the lesser papers, which dazzled his listeners.

The next day, Madame Moreau talked at length about all Louise's fine qualities; she went on to enumerate the woods and farms she would one day own. Monsieur Roque's fortune was considerable.

He had made that fortune through investments he'd made for Monsieur Dambreuse; by lending money to people who could offer good security for mortgages, he was able to pick up extra fees and commissions. He kept a close eye on his capital, and avoided risk. Moreover, old Roque never hesitated to foreclose; then he would buy back the mortgaged property at a favorable price, and when Monsieur Dambreuse saw his investments being covered, he thought his business affairs were being handled with great efficiency.

But since such not-quite-legal maneuvers put him in a potentially compromising position, he could refuse nothing to his agent. And one of the latter's requests involved his being friendly to Frédéric.

In fact old Roque had long nursed a deep-seated ambition. He wanted his daughter to become a countess; and the only route to that goal that he could see, the only option that would also ensure her happiness, involved this particular young man.

Monsieur Dambreuse could exert his influence to get the young man's title restored, for Madame Moreau was the daughter of a Comte de Fouvens and related, moreover, to some of the oldest families in the Champagne region, the Lavernades and the d'Etrignys. As for the Moreau side, a gothic inscription near the mills at Villenueve-l'Archevêque referred to a Jacob Moreau who had rebuilt them in 1596; and the tomb of his son, Pierre Moreau, first groom to the king under Louis XIV, could be seen in the Chapel of Saint-Nicolas.

Nobility like this fascinated Monsieur Roque, who was the son of a former servant. And even if the title of count were not forthcoming, he could console himself with another possibility: when Monsieur Dambreuse was elevated to the peerage, Frédéric could become a député, and as such he could be of real use to him in his business dealings, helping him land orders and concessions. And he did like the young man. In short, he wanted to land him as a son-in-law because he'd been thinking about the idea for a long time, and the appeal of it grew stronger every day.

Nowadays he'd taken to frequenting the church—and he'd managed to bring Madame Moreau around, mainly through the lure of a title. But she had been careful not to make any definitive agreement.

Thus, within a week's time, without any commitments having been made, Frédéric began to be thought of as Mademoiselle Louise's "intended," and old Roque, not the most scrupulous of men, would sometimes leave them alone together.

V

Deslauriers had taken home with him a copy of Frédéric's document giving him full power of attorney; but after he'd made his way up the five flights of stairs and was alone in his dismal office, sitting in his leather chair, the sight of the paper sickened him.

He was sick of it all, of the thirty-two-sou restaurants, of having to take the omnibus, of being poor, of continuing to struggle. He picked up some of the other papers from the stacks lying on his desk: the

prospectus of the coal-mine company, with lists of all the mines and details about their capacities. Frédéric had left it here for him, seeking his opinion.

Then a thought occurred to him: he could go to Monsieur Dambreuse and apply for the secretary position for himself. The position, of course, would require him to buy some certain number of shares. Then he saw how foolish the idea was, and he said to himself, "Oh, no! That would be too wrong."

Then he tried to think of some way to get the fifteen thousand francs back. A sum like that was nothing for Frédéric! But if he'd been able to get hold of it—what a lift it would have given him! And the former clerk waxed indignant at the sheer size of Frédéric's fortune.

"He's just wasting it. He's nothing but an egoist. Oh! To hell with his fifteen thousand francs!"

Why had he lent them like that? It was all for that Madame Arnoux. She was his mistress! Deslauriers had no doubts about that. "And there's another thing that takes money!" Hatred flooded his thoughts.

Then he thought about Frédéric's looks. He had always thought there was an almost feminine charm about him; and from there he began to feel admiration for him, because he had been able to pull off something that he, Deslauriers, never could.

But isn't willpower the only thing that really mattered in enterprises like that? So, with enough determination, one could triumph over anything. . . .

"Ah! Now that would be amusing!"

But then he felt shame at such a betrayal—and yet, a moment later: "Why? What should I be afraid of?"

He had heard so much talk about Madame Arnoux that she had come to seem something truly extraordinary in his imagination. The unshakeable persistence of this love irritated him, like a problem to be solved. And his own rather theatrical asceticism was becoming a bore. Moreover, that society woman (which is what he thought she was) shone in the fantasy of the lawyer like the embodiment of a thousand unknown, untasted pleasures. In his poverty, he lusted after luxury in its most obvious form.

"After all, if he gets upset, too bad! He's behaved too badly toward me for me to worry about it. And I'm not even sure that she's really his mistress! He denied it to me. So, I'm free—I can do as I please!"

The desire to try out the new idea grew on him. It would be a test of his own powers, and he wanted to see—so much so that one day, all of a sudden, he polished his boots himself, bought some white gloves, and set out, putting himself in Frédéric's place, even imagining that he was Frédéric by an extraordinary mental process that combined vengeance with sympathy, imitation with audacity.

He had himself announced as "Doctor Deslauriers."

Madame Arnoux was surprised. She hadn't sent for a doctor.

"Oh, no, pardon me—my doctorate is in law! I'm here on behalf of Monsieur Moreau."

The name seemed to disturb her.

So much the better! thought the former clerk; if she was willing to have him, she'll have me too! The idea that it was easier to take the place of a former lover than that of a husband encouraged him.

He'd had the pleasure of meeting her once before, at the Palais; he even mentioned the specific date. So precise a memory startled her. He went on, in an oily tone: "Back then you were already experiencing . . . some difficulties . . . with your business affairs."

She said nothing; so it was true.

He began speaking about other topics, this and that, her house, the factory; then, noticing the miniature portraits around the mirror: "Ah! These are your family, I assume?"

He looked at one in particular, an older woman, Madame Arnoux's mother.

"She looks like an excellent person—and she looks like the southern type." When she said that in fact her mother was from Chartres: "Oh, Chartres! Lovely little town." He went on to praise the cathedral and the pies; then, returning to the portrait, he said he could see the resemblance to Madame Arnoux, and launched into a flurry of indirect flattery. She didn't seem offended. His confidence rising, he said that he'd known Arnoux for some time.

"Fine man! But he does land himself in troubles. Now, with this mortgage, for example, it's hard to imagine a more thoughtless . . ."

"Yes, I know!" she said, shrugging her shoulders.

This involuntary expression of contempt encouraged Deslauriers to push on a bit further.

"That whole kaolin business—you might not be aware of this—very nearly turned into a disaster, and his reputation . . ."

Seeing her frown brought him up short.

He retreated to generalizations, expressing his sympathies for women whose husbands squandered their fortunes . . .

"But it's all his money, monsieur! I didn't have any."

Well, no matter—you could never tell. . . . A man with some experience might be useful. He offered his full devotion to her interests, praising his own abilities; and he looked her directly in the eye, through his own spectacles, which glinted.

A wave of fatigue came over her; then, suddenly, "Get to the point, monsieur, please!"

He brought out the papers. "This is Frédéric's power of attorney. With a document like this in the hands of a bailiff who gets a court order, nothing could be simpler; within twenty-four hours . . ." She remained impassive, so he tried a different approach. "But anyway, I really don't see why he needs this money—he has plenty already!"

"What? You mean Monsieur Moreau was so good as to . . ."

"Oh, yes, yes indeed."

Now Deslauriers began to praise him, quickly shifting to denigration but in the sweetest of tones, hinting that he was forgetful, self-centered, and miserly.

"I thought he was your friend, monsieur?"

"Yes, but that doesn't keep me from seeing his faults. For one thing, he doesn't seem to appreciate . . . how can I put it? . . . sympathy. . . ."

Madame Arnoux was leafing through the pages of the thick file. She interrupted him to ask the meaning of a particular word.

He bent down over her shoulder, so close that he brushed against her cheek. She blushed; the blush inflamed Deslauriers; he seized her hand and began kissing it greedily.

"Monsieur! What are you doing?"

She stood up straight, her back against the wall, and fixing her angry dark eyes on him, she rooted him to the spot.

"Listen to me! I'm in love with you!"

She laughed out loud, a bitter, shrill, heartbreaking laugh. It infuriated Deslauriers so much he felt like strangling her. He restrained himself; and putting on a contrite face, he begged her forgiveness. "Oh, you've got it all wrong. I wouldn't abandon you, the way he has . . ."

"Who? Who are you talking about?"

"Frédéric!"

"I'm not worried about Monsieur Moreau—I've already told you that."

"Oh, forgive me! Forgive me!" Then, in a biting tone, speaking very slowly and distinctly: "You see, I did think you were interested enough in him to be pleased to hear the news . . ."

She went very pale.

The former clerk continued. "He's getting married."

"Him!"

"In a month or so, to Mademoiselle Roque, the daughter of Monsieur Dambreuse's agent. He's back in Nogent now, for that very purpose."

She put her hand to her heart, as if she'd just suffered a great blow; but then she turned and rang the bell for the servant. Deslauriers didn't wait to be thrown out. When she turned around, he was gone.

Madame Arnoux felt a little stifled. She went to the window to breathe some fresh air.

Across the street, on the sidewalk, a packer in shirtsleeves was nailing up a crate. A few cabs passed by. She closed the window and went to sit down. The tall houses across the way blocked out the sun; a cold sunlight filled the apartment. Her children were out; nothing was moving. She felt utterly deserted.

She began trembling nervously.

"What am I feeling? Is it possible I love him?"

Then suddenly she knew: "I do—I love him! . . . I love him!"

She felt as if she were sinking into some deep abyss, endlessly sinking. The clock struck three. She listened to the chimes as they died away. And she remained sitting on the edge of her chair, staring at nothing, a smile fixed on her face.

That same afternoon, at that same moment, Frédéric and Mademoiselle Louise were strolling in the garden that Monsieur Roque owned, on the tip of the island. Old Catherine was keeping an eye on them from a distance; they were walking along side by side, and Frédéric was saying, "Do you remember when I used to take you with me for walks in the country?"

"You were so good to me!" she replied. "You used to help me make cakes out of sand, fill up my watering can, push me on the swing!"

"Whatever happened to all those dolls you used to have, the ones you named after queens and marquises?"

"I really don't know!"

"And your little dog, Moricaud?"

"He drowned, the poor thing!"

"And that *Don Quixote* with the illustrations that you and I colored?"

"Oh, I still have that!"

He reminded her of the day of her First Communion, and how sweet she looked at Vespers, with her white veil and her big candle, as all the little girls processed around the church and the bells rang out.

Such memories, evidently, had no charms for Mademoiselle Roque, because she said nothing in reply; then, after a minute or two: "You're very mean, you know, not telling me anything about what you've been doing!"

Frédéric excused himself on the grounds of having had so much work to do.

"What work? What have you been doing?"

The question embarrassed him, but he said he'd been studying politics.

"Ah!"

Then, without asking anything further, "So that keeps you busy, but what about me. . . ."

She went on to describe how empty her life was, with no one to visit, not even the slightest pleasures, not even the smallest distractions! She wished she could take up horseback riding.

"The priest says it isn't nice for a girl to do that. All these stupid proprieties! When I was a girl, they let me do whatever I wanted—now, they don't let me do anything!"

"But your father loves you!"

"Yes, but . . ."

And she heaved a sigh that seemed to say, "I need more than that to be happy."

Then they fell silent. All they heard was the crunch of the sand beneath their feet and the murmuring of the waterfall, because the Seine split in two above Nogent. One branch turns the mill wheels in that area with its overflow, to rejoin the main stream a little farther down; and when you're coming from the bridges, you'll see a grassy hill on one side, with a white house at its top. On the left, in the meadows, lines of poplars stretched away; the horizon was bounded by a curve in the river, still as a mirror, large insects darting over its smooth surface. Clumps of reeds and rushes were dotted, unevenly,

along its edges; all sorts of plants had taken root there, blooming out in golden buds and yellow clusters, spiking upward in cattails and amaranth, or popping out in random green shoots. One of the river's inlets was blanketed with waterlilies; and ranks of old oak trees, concealing spring-traps, were the bankside garden's only line of defense.

Farther back was a kitchen garden, enclosed by four walls with slate coping, and here squares of newly dug earth formed brown patches. The cloches over the melon beds glinted in the sun; artichokes, beans, spinach, carrots, and tomatoes alternated all the way back to a bed of asparagus, which looked like a little forest of feathers.

All this area, under the Directory,[99] had been called a "folly." But since then, the trees had grown to great heights. Clematis spread all around the arbor, the pathways were covered with moss, and brambles were flourishing everywhere. Fragments of crumbled statuary, their plaster peeling, stuck up here and there. Walking along, one came upon bits of old wire ornaments. All that remained of a pavilion were two ground-level rooms with rags of peeling blue wallpaper. Along its front was a pergola with some wooden trellises, overgrown with vines, standing on brick footings.

They walked in together and, the light scattering through the foliage, Frédéric observed the shadows of the leaves on her face as he spoke to her.

She wore her red hair tied back in a chignon, held in place by a pin with a glass knob, meant to look somewhat like an emerald; and despite her still being in the mourning period, she wore (in her childlike bad taste) straw slippers with pink satin trim, vulgar things she'd probably bought at some fair. He noticed them, and paid her a sarcastic compliment on them.

"Don't make fun of me!" she said.

Then, looking him over critically, from his gray felt hat down to his silk socks: "Aren't you fashionable!"

She asked him to suggest some books she ought to read. He mentioned several; and she said, "Aren't you smart!"

While still a child, she had fallen into one of those childish loves that combine the purity of religion with the violence of physical need. He had been friend, brother, tutor to her, had enlivened her mind, made her heart beat faster, and inadvertently filled the very depths of her being with a latent, lasting intoxication. Then he had left her,

right at a tragic moment of crisis, when her mother died, and those twin despairs bled into each other. While absent, her memory of him built him up into an ideal; when he came back it was with a sort of halo, and she unguardedly gave herself up to the happiness of seeing him again.

For the first time in his life, Frédéric felt loved; and this new pleasure—which, however, didn't amount to much more than a pleasant sensation—made him swell up a little with pride; he spread out his arms and tossed his head back.

A great, solitary cloud was passing overhead.

"It's on its way to Paris," said Louise. "You'd like to follow it, wouldn't you?"

"Me? Why?"

"Who knows?"

She gave him a penetrating look. "Maybe because you have—" and she paused, searching for the right word—"some attachment in Paris."

"No—I have no attachment."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, quite sure!"

In less than one year, the girl had undergone an extraordinary transformation; it surprised Frédéric. After a moment's silence, he added, "We ought to use 'tu' with each other, like we used to—don't you think?"

"No."

"Why"

"Because!"

He asked again, and she lowered her head to reply: "I don't dare."

They had reached the end of the garden, at the Livon beach. Frédéric gave in to a boyish impulse and began skimming stones across the water. She told him to sit down. He obeyed; then as they watched the waterfall, he said, "It's like Niagara."

He started talking about distant countries, grand voyages. The idea of going on one was enchanting to her. She wouldn't be afraid of anything, not even tempests or lions.

Sitting there side by side, they picked up handfuls of sand and let it run out through their fingers as they talked on—and the warm wind from the plains carried the scent of lavender mixed with that of tar, from a boat behind the lock, to them. The sun glistened on the

waterfall; the greenish blocks of the low wall over which the water washed looked as if they were veiled by a sheet of silver gauze, endlessly unspooling. A long line of foam spurted up, rhythmically, down below. It went on to form itself into little eddies, whirlpools, a thousand different cross-currents, before finally settling into a single, flat, clear pool.

Louise murmured that she envied the lives of the fish. "It must be so wonderful to roll around down under the water, perfectly at ease, feeling yourself being caressed all over." And she trembled a little in a moment of sensual delight.

But then they heard a voice calling out: "Where are you?"

"Your maid—she's calling for you," said Frédéric.

"All right! All right!"

Louise didn't move.

"She'll be cross with you," Frédéric added.

"I don't care! And anyway . . ." Mademoiselle Roque made a gesture signifying that she knew how to handle the maid.

But she did get up, and said she had a headache. As they were walking past a big shed with firewood in it: "Want to go into the *égaud*?"[100]

He pretended not to understand the word, and even teased her about her accent. Slowly, the corners of her mouth began to droop, and she bit her lips; she stepped away from him, sulking.

Frédéric caught up with her, swearing that he hadn't meant to hurt her feelings, and that he liked her very much.

"Is that true?" she cried, looking at him while a smile lit up her whole freckled face.

He couldn't resist that direct, open expression, or the freshness of her youth, and he answered, "Why would I lie to you? . . . You don't doubt me, do you?" He put his left arm around her waist.

She gave a little cry, as soft as the coo of a dove; her head fell back; she almost fainted, and he helped support her. Scruples, a sense of honor—he didn't need to call on such things, because the sight of this virgin offering herself to him frightened him. He helped her take a few steps, gently and slowly. He stopped saying affectionate phrases, and made a point of talking now only about insignificant topics, bringing up some of the local Nogent people.

Abruptly she pushed him away, saying bitterly, "You'd never have the courage to take me away from here!"

He stood there, completely bewildered. She burst into tears, and pressed her head against his chest. "How can I live without you!"

He tried to calm her down. She put both hands on his shoulders in order to look him squarely in the face, and her teary green eyes locked directly onto his almost ferociously: "Do you want to be my husband?"

"But . . ." said Frédéric, struggling to find some appropriate response. "Well, of course . . . I couldn't ask for anything more . . ."

Just then, Monsieur Roque's cap appeared behind a lilac bush.

He took his "young friend" off with him for a couple of days to tour some of his properties; and Frédéric, when he returned to his mother's house, found three letters waiting for him.

The first was from Monsieur Dambreuse, inviting him to dinner on the previous Tuesday. Why such politeness? Had he been pardoned for his tirade?

The second was from Rosanette. She thanked him for having risked his life for her; Frédéric had trouble understanding what she was saying, but then finally, after a great deal of circumlocution, she implored him—invoking his friendship for her, depending on his kindness, his delicacy, down on her knees, as if she were begging for bread—due to an emergency, could he possibly let her have a trivial sum, a mere five hundred francs. He decided at once to give it to her.

The third letter was from Deslauriers, talking about the power of attorney at length and in obscure terms. The lawyer hadn't yet made any decisions. He didn't want to cause any trouble: "There's no need at all for you to come back!" He went on to insist, oddly, that Frédéric stay in Nogent.

Frédéric wondered what might lay behind all this; and he felt like returning to Paris at once; that attempt to dictate to him what to do disgusted him.

Moreover, he was beginning to feel nostalgia for the boulevards; and then his mother was being so insistent, and Monsieur Roque was sticking so close to him, and Mademoiselle Louise was so much in love with him that he couldn't avoid declaring himself soon, one way or the other. He needed to think; he could think more clearly if he could put some distance between himself and them.

To justify his leaving, he came up with a plausible story, and then he was off, telling everyone—and believing it himself—that he would be back soon.

VI

There was no pleasure this time in his return to Paris; it was an evening toward the end of August, and the boulevards seemed empty; the few people out passing by wore irritated expressions; the fumes of asphalt and tar were everywhere; many of the houses were completely shuttered up; he came back to his place; the curtains were thick with dust; and as he dined alone, Frédéric experienced a strange feeling of being abandoned; then he thought of Mademoiselle Roque.

The idea of getting married was starting to sound less outlandish. They would travel, go to Italy, to the Orient! And he could see her standing on a hilltop, contemplating the landscape below, or, instead, leaning on his arm in a gallery in Florence, pausing in front of a painting. What a pleasure it would be to watch that dear little thing opening up to the splendors of Art and Nature! Once she got out of her native environment, she would become a charming companion. And Monsieur Roque's money was attractive too. Yet he couldn't help feeling that a motive like that showed weakness; it was degrading.

But he was absolutely determined, no matter what happened, to change the way he'd been living—that is, to stop wasting his emotions on futile loves—and now he even hesitated about carrying out the errand Louise had given him. This was to go to Arnoux's shop and buy her the two big polychrome statues of Africans, like those in the prefecture of Troyes. She knew that particular manufacturer's trademark and wouldn't accept any substitutes. Frédéric was afraid of going to their place, and of falling right back into his old passion.

Such thoughts preoccupied him all evening; and he was about to go to bed when a woman came in.

"It's me!" said a laughing Mademoiselle Vatnaz. "Rosanette sent me over."

So those two were friends again?

"Good lord, yes! I'm not unforgiving, you know. And besides, that poor girl . . . but it's a long story."

In short, the Marshal wanted to see him, and she was waiting for his response to that letter of hers, which had been forwarded from Paris to Nogent; Mademoiselle Vatnaz had no idea as to its contents. Then Frédéric asked for news about the Marshal.

She was currently "with" a very rich man, a Russian, Prince Tzernoukoff, who'd seen her at the horse races last summer.

"He has three carriages, a saddle horse, livery, a groom all dressed up in English chic, a house in the country, a box at the Italiens, and a whole heap of other things. So there you go, my dear."

And Vatnaz herself seemed livelier, happier, as if the change in fortunes had benefited her too. She removed her gloves and began examining the furniture and ornaments in the bedroom. She estimated the exact price of each item, like a second-hand dealer. He really should have consulted her, to get better prices; but she congratulated him on his good taste.

"Oh, now this one is pretty, very nice! It's just like you to have thought of that."

Then, noticing a door by the bed in the alcove, "So that's the door your girlfriends take when they leave, eh?"

And with that she chucked him playfully on the chin. He jumped a little at the feel of her long hands, so thin and soft. She wore lace edging around her wrists, and the bodice of her green dress was trimmed with gold braid, like a hussar would wear. The brim of her black tulle hat drooped down, partly concealing her forehead; beneath it, her eyes gleamed; the scent of patchouli drifted toward him from her hair; the Carcel lamp, standing on the table, lit up her face from below, like the footlights in a theatre, making her jaw seem to jut out—and suddenly this ugly woman who moved in panther-like undulations inspired an enormous lust in Frédéric, an animal-like voluptuous desire.

She spoke in an ingratiating tone as she took three pieces of paper out of her purse: "You'll take these for me!"

They were three tickets to a benefit performance for Delmar.

"What? Him?"

"Of course!"

"Really?"

Mademoiselle Vatnaz offered no further explanation but added that she still adored the man, more than ever. As she put it, the actor clearly deserved a place among "the best of our time." And it wasn't so much that he acted this or that particular character, but that he represented France herself, the People! He had "a true humanitarian soul; he understood the priestly character of the Artist!" To put an end to these hymns of praise, Frédéric gave her the money for the three tickets.

"No need for you to mention anything about this to her—but oh, look at the time, my God! I simply must leave. Oh yes, I forgot the address—it's 14, Rue Grange-Batelière."

And, as she stood in the doorway: "Goodbye now, you beloved man!"

"Beloved by whom?" Frédéric asked himself. "What a strange person!"

And he remembered how Dussardier had said about her one day: "Not exactly a prize, that one!"—as if he were referring to something not quite honorable in her past.

The next day he went to visit the Marshal. She was living in a new place, with awnings that overhung the street. On every landing there was a mirror on the wall, a rustic plant stand by the window, and canvas carpeting on the stairs; and when you stepped in from the street, the coolness of the stairway was immediately refreshing.

A manservant opened the door, wearing a red waistcoat. In the foyer, on a bench, sat a woman and two men, tradesmen of some sort no doubt, patiently waiting, as if they were in the antechamber of a minister of state. To the left, the door to the dining room stood half open, allowing a glimpse of empty bottles on the buffets and napkins draped on the backs of chairs; parallel to that, a long gallery could be seen, in which gold-painted posts held up an espalier of roses. Outside, down below in the courtyard, two men with bare arms were busily polishing a landau. Their voices mounted up to the foyer, along with, now and then, the sound of a curry-comb banging against a stone.

The manservant returned. "Madame will see monsieur now"; and he brought Frédéric through a second foyer, then a large drawing room hung with yellow brocade, with rope-mouldings that ran from the corners of the ceiling to the center, which seemed to blend directly in with the cable-shaped branches of the chandelier. There must have been a party the night before; cigar ashes littered all the consoles.

Finally, he was taken into a kind of boudoir that received only dim light through a few stained-glass windows. The wood door frames were carved in a clover pattern; behind a balustrade, three purple mattresses formed a divan, and on it lay the pipe of a platinum hookah. Instead of a mirror above the fireplace, the mantel consisted of a series of shelves in a pyramidal shape, upon which sat a large collection

of curios: old silver watches, Bohemian vases, clasps with jewels, jade buttons, enamels, Chinese porcelain figurines, a little Byzantine Virgin Mary with a silver-gilt cope; and all of this seemed to merge into a whole with the golden light, the bluish carpet, the gleam of the mother-of-pearl stools, and the tawny tint of the reddish-brown leather on the walls. In the corners, on small pedestals, stood bunches of flowers in bronze vases; their scent thickened the air.

Rosanette appeared, wearing a pink satin jacket, trousers of white cashmere, a necklace of piastres, and a red skullcap with jasmine wreathed around it.

Frédéric gave a little start of surprise; he then said that he'd brought "the thing you mentioned," and offered her the bank note. She looked at him as if dumbfounded; and as he continued holding it, and saw no table on which he could put it, he said, "Well, take it!"

She took it and tossed it casually onto the divan, saying, "It's very nice of you."

It was for purchasing a plot of land in Belleville; she was paying for it in installments. Her casual tone wounded Frédéric. But then, so much the better! It was a kind of vengeance for the past.

"Do sit down!" she said. "Over here, closer to me." Then she added, in a serious tone: "First, I need to thank you, my dear, for risking your life over me."

"Ah! That was nothing at all."

The Marshal went on to express her gratitude at embarrassing length; he was sure that she believed he had fought for Arnoux's sake, since the latter thought that was the case, and he could not possibly resist the urge to tell her about it.

Maybe she's laughing at me, thought Frédéric.

There was nothing more to say, and claiming he had an engagement, Frédéric got up to go.

"No! Stay!"

He sat back down and complimented her on her outfit.

She groaned and replied, "Oh, it's the Prince who likes to see me looking like this! And I have to smoke with gadgets like this," Rosanette added, pointing to the hookah. "Would you like to try?"

A light was brought, but the tobacco was hard to light, and she paced impatiently back and forth. Then she suddenly turned languid, and she lay on the divan without moving, a cushion under her armpit,

her body twisted slightly, one knee bent and the other leg straight. The long snake of red leather formed loops on the floor, and curled around her arm. She put the amber mouthpiece to her lips and gazed at Frédéric through half-closed eyes, spirals of smoke billowing between them. Her breathing made the water gurgle, and from time to time she murmured, "The poor dear! Poor darling!"

He tried to think of a manageable conversation topic, and he settled on Vatnaz. He said he thought she was quite elegant.

"Elegant!" replied the Marshal. "That one—she's lucky to have me!" She said nothing more, the atmosphere between them having become so strained.

Both of them felt that constraint, that blockage between them. In fact the duel—which Rosanette believed he had fought for her—had flattered her vanity. She had been very surprised that he hadn't rushed over to claim a reward for his gallantry; she came up with the idea of the loan of five hundred francs simply as a pretext to make him come visit her. But now Frédéric didn't seem to show any tenderness toward her—why? The whole thing really did display a remarkable refinement of feeling on his part, and in a sudden rush of emotion she said to him, "Would you like to come stay with us at the seaside?"

"Who is 'us'?"

"Me and my little Russian bird; I'll pass you off as my cousin, the way they do in the old plays."

"Many thanks!"

"Or you could come and find a place of your own nearby."

He found the idea of hiding from a rich man humiliating. "No, I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Well, whatever you like!"

Rosanette turned away, a tear in her eye. Frédéric saw it, and to show some friendliness, he said he was glad to see her set up in such an excellent position.

She shrugged her shoulders. What was wrong? Could it be that she didn't feel loved?

"Oh no—people always love me!"

And she added, "But then, it's a matter of *how* they love me."

Complaining that she was "stifling with the heat," the Marshal took off her jacket, and with only a silk chemise on underneath it, she

leaned her head on his shoulder and gazed up at him provocatively, looking like a slave girl.

Frédéric was a man too self-aware not to consider that the vicomte, or Monsieur de Comaing, or somebody else might come in. And he had been duped far too many times by these same tantalizing glances to allow himself to be put in a humiliating, compromising situation.

She wanted to hear about his friends, about what he was doing for entertainment; she even started asking about his business affairs and offered to lend him money if he needed it. That was the last straw for Frédéric; he picked up his hat. "All right then, my dear, have a good time at the seaside. Goodbye now!"

Her eyes widened in surprise; then she said, drily, "Goodbye!"

He went out through the yellow drawing room and the second foyer. There he saw, on a table, between a bowl full of visiting cards and an inkstand, an engraved silver casket. It was Madame Arnoux's! He suddenly felt a rush of tenderness, and then a sense of indignation, of profanation. He felt like picking it up and opening it. But he was afraid of being seen, so he left.

He remained virtuous. He did not let himself go visit the Arnoux home.

He sent his servant to purchase the two African statuettes, giving him careful instructions; the pair were crated up and sent off to Nogent that very evening. The next day, as he was on his way to see Deslauriers, at the corner of the Rue Viviennne and the boulevard, he found himself face to face with Madame Arnoux.

The first instinct, for both of them, was to draw back; then, the same smile came to their lips, and they went up to each other. For a moment, neither of them spoke.

She was bathed in sunshine—and her oval face, her long lashes, her black lace shawl, clinging around her shoulders, her dove-colored shot-silk dress, the little bunch of violets tucked into a corner of her hat: all of it seemed to him to be utterly glorious. An infinite sweetness seemed to flow from her lovely eyes; and he stammered out the first things he could think of.

"How is Arnoux?" Frédéric asked.

"Fine, thank you."

"And your children?"

"They're doing very well."

"Ah . . . ah! Yes. Isn't this weather wonderful?"

"Splendid, really."

"Are you out shopping?"

"Yes."

Then, with a slight nod of the head, "Goodbye then!"

She hadn't offered to shake hands, hadn't said a single affectionate word, and hadn't even invited him to come see her, but what did that matter! He wouldn't have traded this chance meeting for the finest of adventures; and he savored the sweetness of it as he walked along.

Deslauriers, surprised to see him, concealed his irritation—for he still clung to some hope regarding Madame Arnoux; and he had written to Frédéric urging him to stay in Nogent in order to keep the field clear for his own maneuvering.

But he said that he had been to see her, in order to find out whether their marriage contract stipulated joint ownership, in which case they could start proceedings against the wife. "And you should have seen her face when I told her about your marriage."

"My marriage! Why did you bring that up?"

"I had to, to prove to her that you really needed your money. And anybody who was really uninterested in you would not have nearly fainted, the way she did."

"She did? Really?'"

"Oh yes, you old rogue, now you're giving yourself away! Come on now—tell the truth."

And now the man who loved Madame Arnoux was overwhelmed by a sudden cowardice.

"No, really, I assure you! Word of honor!"

These weak denials only confirmed what Deslauriers thought. He congratulated him. He asked for "details." Frédéric gave him none, and resisted the urge to make some up.

As for the mortgage, he told him to do nothing now, just to wait. Deslauriers thought that was a mistake, and he said so in very emphatic terms.

Clearly he was gloomier now, more mean-spirited, more irritable than ever. If things hadn't improved in another year, he would either leave and go to America or else blow his brains out. Moreover he sounded so angrily fanatical in his radicalism that Frédéric couldn't help but say, "You sound like Sénécal."

Speaking of whom, Deslauriers said that he had been released from Sainte-Pélagie, as the investigation hadn't turned up enough proof to bring him to trial.

To celebrate his release, Dussardier wanted to give a "punch party," and implored Frédéric to come too, even though, he warned him, Hussonnet would be there, as he had shown himself to be a good friend to Sénécal.

In fact, *Le Flambard* had just expanded to become an agency, with a prospectus saying it incorporated "a wine office, advertising agency, debt-collection and information bureau, etc." But the Bohemian feared that his literary reputation might be somewhat tainted by this business connection, so he had hired on the former math tutor to oversee the accounts. Pathetic as the position was, Sénécal would have starved without it. Frédéric, not wanting to hurt the feelings of such a good fellow as the clerk Dussardier, accepted the invitation.

Three days before the party, Dussardier waxed the red tile floors of his garret all by himself, beat the dust out of his armchair, and dusted the mantel, on which stood an alabaster clock under a glass globe, flanked by a stalactite and a coconut shell. His two candlesticks and his bedside candle stand didn't give enough light, so he borrowed a pair of sconces from his concierge; and those five lights were all set up on a chest of drawers, which was covered with three napkins to give a decent setting for the macaroons, the biscuits, a brioche, and a dozen bottles of beer. Across the room, against the yellow-papered wall, stood a small mahogany bookcase, containing the *Fables* of Lachambeaudie, the *Mysteries of Paris,* Norvins's *Napoleon*—and, in the middle of the alcove, Béranger's smiling face stood out from its rosewood frame.[101]

Besides Deslauriers and Sénécal, the other guests included a newly graduated pharmacist, who lacked the money to start up his own shop; a young man who worked in the same company with Dussardier; a traveling wine salesman; an architect; and a gentleman who worked in the insurance business. Régimbart had been unable to come. The others all regretted his absence.

They all greeted Frédéric warmly, for they had all heard, through Dussardier, about the speech he had made at Monsieur Dambreuse's house. Sénécal contented himself with shaking hands with him, in a dignified manner.

Then Sénécal, standing with his back against the mantel, harangued them all on the subject of universal suffrage, while they

sat listening and smoking their pipes. When everyone had the vote, Democracy would reign, along with the principles of the Gospel. Moreover, the time was approaching, as reformist banquets were multiplying in the provinces, and then there was Piedmont, Naples, Tuscany . . .[102]

Deslauriers interrupted, exclaiming: "He's right! This can't go on much longer!"

And he began to give a summary of the situation.

We had sacrificed Holland so that England would be willing to accept Louis-Philippe, but that splendid English alliance was lost, thanks to the Spanish marriages.[103] In Switzerland, Monsieur Guizot, nudged into it by Austria, was supporting the treaties of 1815.[104] And this Prussian Zollverein was going to cause us real difficulties.[105]

"Even if the Grand Duke Constantine does send gifts to Monsieur d'Aumale, that's no reason for us to trust Russia.[106] And as for our domestic policies—you've never seen such blindness, such stupidity! Even the majority refuses to stay unified. And everywhere you hear the same phrase repeated—nothing, nothing, nothing![107] And how does the government respond to the shameful corruption?" With this, Deslauriers adopted a pose, putting his hands on his hips: "They declare that they're satisfied!"[108]

At this allusion to the famous vote, the group broke into applause. Dussardier opened a bottle of beer; the froth splashed out over the curtains, but he seemed not to care; he filled up pipes, cut the cake, carried it around to all, went downstairs several times to see if the punch was ready; and the party quickly became very lively, for all of them felt the same exasperation with Power. Their feeling was intense, based on a hatred of injustice; they mixed legitimate grievances in with most petty, even stupid complaints.

The pharmacist lamented the pitiful state of our navy. The insurance man simply couldn't tolerate Maréchal Soult's two sentries.[109] Deslauriers denounced the Jesuits, pointing out that they'd recently set up again in Lille—openly![110] Sénécal despised Monsieur Cousin even more; eclecticism, which supposedly taught the right use of reason, in fact encouraged mere egoism and undermined solidarity.[111] The wine salesman, out of his depths with such topics, shouted that Sénécal was forgetting the real scandals:

"Now take this royal coach on the Nord railway line: it's going to cost eighty thousand francs! And who's supposed to pay for it?"

"Yes, that's right—who's going to pay?" the clerk said, feeling as angry and indignant as if they'd just taken the money straight out of his own pockets.

Then there were angry complaints about the sharks in the stock market, and the corruption among the civil servants. But you needed to go up even higher, according to Sénécal, and start off by accusing the princes, who were bringing back the mores of the Regency.

"Didn't you see where, just the other day, a group of the Duc de Montpensier's friends were coming back from Vincennes, probably drunk, and they were singing so loud that they woke up the workers in the faubourg Saint-Antoine?"

"Yes, and people even started shouting, 'Down with the thieves!'" said the pharmacist. "I was there, and I shouted it too!"

"So much the better! The People are finally waking up, after the Teste-Cubières trial!"[112]

"That trial really got me angry," said Dussardier, "because it disgraced an old soldier."

"Do you know," Sénécal went on, "what they found at the Duchesse de Praslin's place?"[113]

But just then the door was kicked open, and Hussonnet came in.

"Greetings, your lordships!" he said, sitting down on the bed.

No one referred to his article; anyway, he was sorry now that he'd written it, because the Marshal had given him a real scolding over it.

He had just been at Dumas's theater to see *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge,* and if you asked him, it was a real bore.[114]

Such a reaction shocked the democrats—because the tale, its political tendencies, or rather its setting, tended to flatter their own beliefs. They protested. Sénécal brought the discussion to the main point by asking whether the play served the cause of Democracy.

"Well, yes, maybe. . . . But the style . . ."

"In that case it's good. What does the style matter? The Idea is what counts."

And preventing Frédéric from speaking, Sénécal continued, "I was just mentioning that, with regard to this Praslin business . . ." But Hussonnet interrupted.

"Oh, not that tune again! The whole thing disgusts me!"

"And you're not the only one!" said Deslauriers. "It's caused the shutdown of five papers. Listen to this." He took out his notebook and read:

"'Since this, our best of all possible republics, was set up, we have seen 1,229 prosecutions of the press, as a result of which journalists have been sentenced to a total of 30,141 years in prison, not to mention the trivial sum of 7,110,500 francs in fines.' Delightful, isn't it?"

They all laughed bitterly. Frédéric was just as worked up as the others, and he said, "*La Démocratie pacifique* is being prosecuted for publishing a novel titled *The Women's Share*."[115]

"That's too much," said Hussonnet. "Now they're going to deny us our share of women."

"But what's left that hasn't been forbidden?" cried Deslauriers. "You can't smoke in the Luxembourg Gardens, can't sing the hymn to Pius IX . . ."[116]

"And they've banned the printers' banquet!" exclaimed a muffled voice.

It was the architect, sitting hidden away in the shadow of the alcove, and entirely silent until now. He went on to say that, just the week before, a man had been convicted for insulting the king; the man's name was Rouget.

"Caught red-handed, eh?" said Hussonnet, laughing.

Sénécal thought that joke so tasteless that he accused Hussonnet of standing up for "that juggler of the Hôtel de Ville, the friend of the traitor Dumouriez."[117]

"Me? Oh no—just the opposite!"

He saw Louis-Philippe as commonplace, banal, about as bright as a National Guardsman, more like a grocer in a cotton cap than a king. Then, putting his hand on his heart, the Bohemian recited a series of sanctimonious phrases: "It's always with renewed pleasure . . . the Polish nation will never perish . . . our grand endeavors will continue . . . and do contribute some cash for my little family . . ." Everyone began laughing, proclaiming him a real wit, sharp as can be; and their joy only expanded when they saw the vendor bringing in the punch bowl.

Between the flames of the punch and those of the candles, the room began to get warm; and the light streaming out of their attic window crossed the yard, illuminating the edge of a rooftop across the way, its black chimney standing out against the night sky. They all talked at once, and all very loudly; they took off their jackets; they bumped up against the furniture, and clinked their glasses.

Hussonnet cried out: "Suffer the grand ladies to enter in! More *Tour de Nesle,* if you please, more local color, more of the Rembrandt type thing, dammit!"[118]

And the pharmacist, endlessly stirring the punch, began to bellow out:

I've got two big oxen in my stable,
Two white oxen . . .[119]

Sénécal clapped his hand over the man's mouth; he didn't like any kind of disorder; and the other tenants were looking out their windows, surprised at all the unusual rowdy noise coming from Dussardier's place.

But Dussardier was in high spirits, saying that it reminded him of their get-togethers on the Quai Napoléon, though several people from those days were missing tonight, "like Pellerin, for instance."

"We can do without him," said Frédéric.

Deslauriers asked what Martinon was doing these days.

Frédéric threw off all restraint and gave in to the ill will he felt toward that individual, vigorously attacking his mind, his character, his cheap, phony elegance, in fact everything about the man. He was the very embodiment of the *paysan parvenu,* the country clod masquerading as a city sophisticate![120] The new aristocracy—that is, the bourgeoisie—was a huge step down from the old one, the real nobility. He asserted that, and the democrats all applauded—as if they themselves belonged to the latter and were familiar with the former. They were all delighted with him. The pharmacist even compared him to Monsieur d'Alton-Shee who, despite being a peer of France, stood up for the People.[121]

Finally, it was time for the party to break up. Everyone shook hands warmly; Dussardier, considering Frédéric and Deslauriers as his particular friends, accompanied them on their walk home. When they were all out in the street, the lawyer seemed to grow thoughtful, and after a moment's silence, he said, "So you're really still angry with Pellerin?"

Frédéric didn't hide his bitterness.

But the painter had taken the portrait out of the shop window. People shouldn't quarrel over trivial things! What's the good of making someone your enemy?

"True, he gave in to an angry impulse, but you can't hold that against a man who hasn't got a sou! You couldn't understand a man like that!"

And once Deslauriers had gone up to his apartment, Dussardier made a point of staying with Frédéric; he even tried to talk him into buying the portrait. In fact, Pellerin had come to realize he couldn't intimidate Frédéric, so he'd talked to the two friends and asked them to use their influence to get him to buy the thing.

Later on, Deslauriers came back to the same topic. The artist's demands seemed sensible to him.

"I'm sure that maybe if you offered, say, five hundred francs . . ."

"Oh, all right! Here, take it: give it to him!" said Frédéric.

That very evening, the portrait was delivered. It seemed even more abominable now than it had before. It had been retouched too often, so that now its shadows and half-tones were leaden, looking even darker compared to the highlights; the latter gleamed by contrast, and the total effect was more clash than harmony.

Having bought the painting, Frédéric got his revenge by speaking of it scathingly, bitterly. Deslauriers didn't argue, instead praising his conduct in the affair, for he still had ambitions of forming a group of which he would be the leader; some men take pleasure in getting their friends to do things they wouldn't do themselves.

In the meantime, Frédéric had not visited the Dambreuses. He didn't have the capital he needed. He would have to come up with endless explanations; he simply couldn't make up his mind. Could it be that he was right to hesitate? Nothing seemed certain right then, the coal mine scheme included; he really ought to stop frequenting those kinds of people; finally, Deslauriers managed to turn him against the business. His hatred was turning him virtuous; besides, he'd prefer to see Frédéric remain mediocre. That way they'd stay equals, and he would be able to be closer to him.

The task Mademoiselle Roque had set Frédéric ended up being bungled. Her father wrote him, giving more precise instructions, and he ended his letter with what he meant as a joke: "Sorry to be making you work like an African slave over this!"

Frédéric had no choice but to go back to Arnoux's. He entered the shop, and found it empty. The business was crumbling, so the employees were showing the same kind of indifference as their boss.

He walked along the shelves, lined with porcelain items, which stretched from one end of the room to the other; then, coming to the

far end, by the counter, he walked more heavily, trying to make himself heard.

The door curtain was raised. Madame Arnoux appeared.

"What! You here? You?"

"Yes," she stammered, a little nervously. "I came down to find . . ."

He caught sight of her handkerchief by the desk, and inferred that she had come down to her husband's shop to have a look around, to clear up something that had been bothering her.

"But . . ." she paused. "Did you need something?"

"No, nothing, madame."

"These sales clerks are impossible! They're always off somewhere."

No need to blame them. On the contrary, this situation is owing to their absence, and that's a good thing.

She looked at him ironically.

"Well, what about this wedding?"

"What wedding?"

"Yours!"

"Me? I'm not getting married!"

She made a gesture signifying that she didn't believe him.

"Well, what if I did? A man takes refuge in the mediocre when he can't have the ideal he's always dreamed of!"

"But then not all those dreams of yours were so . . . blameless."

"What do you mean?"

"When you're seen out at the race track with certain . . . kinds of people!"

He inwardly cursed the Marshal. But then a memory came back to him.

"But you're the one, a while back, who begged me to go see her, for Arnoux's sake!"

She nodded, replying, "And you profited from the occasion by amusing yourself."

"Oh, for God's sake! Let's drop all that nonsense."

"Yes, let's, since you're going to get married."

She stifled a sigh, biting her lip.

Then he exclaimed: "But I keep telling you I'm not getting married! Can you really picture somebody like me, somebody who needs intelligent company, somebody with my kind of habits, going off to bury myself in a provincial town to play cards, keep an eye on the

workmen, and stroll around in sabots? What would be my point? I suppose you've heard that she's rich, haven't you? Oh, I couldn't care less about money! And then, after having desperately desired the most beautiful, the most tender, the most enchanting, a kind of paradise in human form—and then, when I've finally found that ideal, when that vision blots out everything else—"

He took her head in both his hands and began kissing her eyelids, repeating "No! No! No! I'll never marry! Never! Never!"

Frozen with both shock and delight, she let him go on kissing her.

They heard the shop door by the stairway close. She jumped a little; and then she stood with her hand held up, as if commanding him to silence. Footsteps approached. Then someone just outside could be heard: "Madame? Are you there?"

"Come in!"

Madame Arnoux was calmly leaning with her elbow on the counter, rolling a pen between her fingers, when the accountant opened the door.

Frédéric stood up.

"My greetings, madame. Will that dinner service be ready? Can I count on it?"

She didn't reply. But the complicity implied in her silence inflamed her face with all the blushes of adultery.

The next day he came back, and she let him come in; in order to keep his advantage, he launched immediately into explaining their meeting on the Champ-de-Mars. It was sheer chance that he had happened to be with that woman. Even allowing for her prettiness—though in fact she was not pretty—how could she possibly occupy his thoughts, even for a minute, when he loved someone else!

"You know that perfectly well. I've told you."

Madame Arnoux bowed her head.

"I wish you hadn't told me."

"Why?"

"Because now, even the most basic moral rules demand that I never see you again!"

He protested, insisting on the innocence of his love for her. His past behavior ought to show her what the future would be like; he had promised himself never to cause any distress in her life, and not to pester her about his feelings.

"But yesterday my feelings were just too much for me."

"We mustn't think about that moment any more, my friend!"

But what could be wrong with two unhappy creatures sharing their sorrows?

"Because after all, you aren't happy either! Oh, I know you, and I know you don't have anyone to give you the affection, the devotion, that you need; I could be the one to give that to you, and to give you anything you wanted! . . . I won't be a problem for you! . . . I swear!"

And despite himself, he went down on his knees before her, pulled down by some inner weight that was simply too heavy.

"Get up!" she said. "Get up, I order you!"

She went on to declare, imperiously, that if he didn't obey her, he would never see her again.

"Oh, I defy you to do that!" exclaimed Frédéric. "What else am I supposed to do in this world? Other people chase after wealth, fame, power! But I have no profession—you, you alone are my sole preoccupation, you're my fortune, you're my only goal, the center of my life, the center of all my thoughts. I couldn't live without you any more than I could live without air to breathe! Don't you feel it, my whole soul straining up toward yours, trying to blend with yours, and don't you see I'm dying from it?"

Madame Arnoux's whole body began trembling. "Oh, go now! I'm begging you!"

The overwhelmed expression on her face brought him up short. He took a step toward her. But she stepped back, joining her hands together.

"Leave now! For God's sake! Have some mercy!"

And Frédéric loved her so much that he left.

Soon thereafter, though, he was furious with himself, calling himself an imbecile, and twenty-four hours later he returned.

Madame was not there. He stood there on the landing, immobilized by anger and indignation. Arnoux came out and explained that his wife had gone just that morning to a little place they were renting in Auteuil, adding that they no longer had the one in Saint-Cloud. "So it's just another whim of hers! But since that's the way it is, it's fine with me. Shall we have dinner together this evening?"

Frédéric pleaded an urgent engagement, and then rushed as fast as he could to Auteuil.

Madame Arnoux couldn't repress a little cry of joy. At that, all his anger evaporated.

He said nothing more about his love. To enhance her trust in him, he even put on a little reserve; and when he asked if he could come visit her again, she replied, "Of course," holding out her hand, which she quickly withdrew.

After that, Frédéric came back to see her often. He would promise extra large tips to the cabdriver. But often he would get exasperated at the speed of the horses' gait, and he would get down; then, when he was out of breath, he would hop on an ominibus; he would gaze around him at the other passengers with disdain: they weren't on their way to see her!

He could pick out her house from afar by the great honeysuckle that covered the planked roof on just one side; it was a kind of Swiss chalet, painted red, with a balcony. Three old chestnut trees stood in the garden; in the middle, on a little rise, was a thatched sunshade, held up by a tree trunk. Under the walls' slate coping, a thick vine had come loose, hanging down here and there like a rotten rope. The bell at the gate was always hard to sound, and when it did, it produced a long peal, and there was always a long wait before anyone came. Every time, he felt an anxious feeling, a vague fear.

Then he could hear the clacking of the maid's slippers on the sand path; sometimes, Madame Arnoux herself would answer. One day he arrived and came up behind her while she was crouching down on the lawn in search of violets.

The daughter had developed a temperament, and she had had to be sent to the convent school. The little son spent the afternoons at his own school. Arnoux took long lunches at the Palais-Royal with Regimbart and his friend Compain. Thus, there was no concern about anyone surprising them.

They could never belong to each other: this was mutually understood. Understanding it kept them free from danger and made it easier for them to open themselves up to each other.

She told him about her life long ago in Chartres, where she lived with her mother; her religious piety when she was around twelve; and then her passion for music, leading her to sing half the night in her little bedroom, from which one could see the ramparts. He told her about his schooldays melancholy, and how in his poetic fantasies a

woman's face always shone so splendidly that when he saw her for the very first time, he had recognized her at once.

These conversations usually centered just on the years they had known each other. He would remind her of insignificant details like the color of her dress at a certain time, what person came to visit on a particular day, what she had said on a particular occasion; and she would marvel, replying, "Yes, I remember!"

They had the same tastes, the same opinions. Often the one listening would break in, exclaiming, "Me too!"

Then came the interminable complaints about Providence.

"Why did it have to be fated that way? . . . If only we'd met then . . ."

"Ah, if only I were younger!"

"No—if only I were older!"

They imagined a life of nothing but love, so fruitful that it would fill up vast, empty lands, surpass every possible joy, defy every possible sorrow, a life in which the hours would flow by in a continual outpouring of their inner selves, one that would have been something radiant and grand, like the shimmering of the stars.

Almost always they stayed outside, standing at the top of the stairs; the treetops, yellowed already by autumn, spread out unevenly before them all the way to the pale sky of the horizon; sometimes they would go out to the farthest end of the avenue, to a summer house in which the only piece of furniture was a sofa of gray linen. Black spots stained the mirror, and the walls smelled of mildew: they would sit there, talking about themselves, about others, about anything at all, perfectly happy. Sometimes the rays of the sun would come through the blind, shaping what looked like the strings of a lyre running from floor to ceiling, and little motes of dust would whirl in those luminous bars. She amused herself by swatting at them with her hand—which Frédéric would seize, tenderly, and he would contemplate the criss-crossing of her veins, the pores in her skin, the shape of her fingers. Each of those fingers was, for him, far more than just a thing, almost a person in itself.

She gave him her gloves and, a week later, her handkerchief. She called him Frédéric, and he called her Marie, adoring the name that was, he thought, created expressly to be sighed in ecstasy, and that seemed to contain within it great clouds of incense and strewn roses.

They eventually began to fix the dates for his visits in advance; and strolling out, as if by mere chance, she would meet him on his way.

She did nothing to kindle his love, lost as she was in that giddy, carefree state that arises from great happiness. She kept wearing, all season long, the same dress of brown silk with brown velvet edging, a loose-fitting garment that suited her soft, easy posture and her serious expression. Moreover, she was approaching the August of a woman's life, the time of reflection and tenderness, when the new maturity shades and tints and deepens the flame of passion, when the impulses of the heart find themselves mingled with the experience of life, and when, in the last stages of blossoming, the whole person overflows with rich, harmonious beauty. Besides, all this was so good, so new! What an abyss there was between the grossness of Arnoux and the adoration of Frédéric!

He was terrified that saying the wrong thing might cause him to lose everything he had gained, saying to himself that it was one thing to miss an opportunity, but it was quite another, much-worse thing to let himself do something stupid. He wanted her to give herself rather than be taken. He felt so much pleasure in the assurance of her love that it was like a foretaste of possession, and yet her physical charms troubled his heart more than his senses. It was like a vague sense of blessedness, so intoxicating in itself that he almost forgot about the possibility of a more complete happiness. Away from her, though, he was consumed by furious desire.

Soon their conversations became marked by long intervals of silence. Sometimes a kind of sexual modesty made them blush in front of each other. The more precautions they took to keep their love hidden, the more it revealed itself; and the stronger the love grew, the more constrained they felt in each other's company. Living with this constant lie, they found their sensibilities becoming sharpened. They breathed in the smell of damp leaves with sensual delight, and the east wind made them suffer; they felt irritated, though there was no cause, and they had ominous premonitions; the sound of a footstep or a snapping twig aroused as much fear in them as if they were guilty; they felt themselves being pushed toward an abyss; the atmosphere between them became stormy; and when Frédéric let a complaint slip out, she blamed herself.

"Yes! I'm doing wrong! I'm acting like some kind of flirt! Don't come back anymore!"

Then he would repeat the same soothing words—and every time, she listened to them with pleasure.

His return to Paris and the busy errands and tasks of New Year's interrupted their meetings for a time.[122] When they recommenced, he was somehow bolder in his manner. She had to get up and go out constantly to give orders and to receive, despite his fervent pleas, all the local neighbors who came to visit her. These visits led to conversations about Léotade, Monsieur Guizot, the Pope, the Palermo insurrection, and the Twelfth Arrondissement banquet, which was causing some unease.[123] Frédéric solaced himself by holding forth on the abuses of the régime; for he, like Deslauriers, was hoping for a universal upheaval, so embittered had he become. Madame Arnoux remained quiet and somber.

Her husband was up to his usual tricks, now keeping as a mistress the factory girl known as the Bordelaise. Madame Arnoux was the one who told Frédéric about it. He tried to use this development as an argument, "since he was cheating on her."

"Oh, I hardly pay any attention to it," she said.

That declaration seemed to cement their intimacy. Did Arnoux suspect anything?

"No! Not anymore."

She told him how, one evening, he had left the two of them together and had then come back and listened from behind the door; when he heard the two of them talking about ordinary topics, he had then felt completely secure.

"And he's quite correct, isn't he?" asked Frédéric in a bitter tone.

"Yes, of course!"

She would have done better not to have said that.

One day, he arrived at the usual time and found she wasn't at home. He took this as a betrayal.

He grew angry when he saw that she always put the flowers he brought into a glass of water.

"Well, where do you want me to put them?"

"Oh, not there! Anyway, they're warmer there than they would be next to your heart."

Another time he reproached her for having gone to the Italiens without letting him know. Others had seen her, admired her, maybe even fallen in love with her; Frédéric clung to such suspicions as a means of quarreling with her, of tormenting her, because he was beginning to hate her, and the least she could do was to share in his pain!

One afternoon, around mid-February, he arrived to find her greatly upset. Eugène was complaining of a sore throat. The doctor had said it was nothing to worry about, just a touch of a cold or a flu. Frédéric was shocked at how ill the child looked. But he reassured the mother nonetheless, citing examples of other children Eugène's age who had had similar illnesses and recovered completely.

"Really?"

"Of course—really!"

"Oh, you're so good!"

And she took his hand. He squeezed hers tightly in his own.

"Don't do that!"

"Why not? You gave me your hand because I comforted you! . . . You think I'm good for that sort of thing, but you don't trust me . . . when I speak about my love!"

"I don't doubt your love, my poor friend!"

"Then why this mistrust? Do you think I'm some kind of wretch who would abuse your trust?"

"Oh, no! I don't think that at all."

"If I could only have some proof of it!"

"What kind of proof?"

"The kind of proof you'd give anybody—the kind you used to give me."

He went on to remind her of a time they had gone out walking together on a foggy winter evening. But all that was long ago! What would be so wrong about them being seen in public together, her taking his arm without any fear on her part, without any hidden agenda on his, especially since there was nobody around to bother them?

"All right, then!" she said, with a courage and a decisiveness that startled Frédéric at first.

But then, quickly, he continued: "Why don't I wait for you at the corner of the Rue Tronchet and the Rue de la Ferme?"

"Good God, my friend!" she stammered.

Without giving her any time to think further, he added, "Next Tuesday then?"

"Tuesday?"

"Yes, between two and three."

"I'll be there!"

She turned away, clearly feeling shame. Frédéric kissed the back of her neck.

"No, don't do that! You'll make me repent."

He stepped back, fearing the usual changeability of women. Then, in the doorway, he murmured softly, as if they had firmly agreed: "Till Tuesday!"

She lowered her eyes, a gesture that could be interpreted as discreet or resigned.

Frédéric had a plan.

He was hoping that either rain or too much sun would cause them to take shelter in a doorway, and once there, that she would agree to go into the house. The difficulty was in finding one that would work.

He started looking for one, and then, in the middle of the Rue Tronchet, he read a sign: *Furnished Rooms.*

The man understood at once what Frédéric was looking for and took him directly to the second floor, showing him there a suite with a bedroom and one other room, with two exits. Frédéric rented it for a month, paying in advance.

Then he went off to three different shops, looking for the rarest perfume he could find; he bought a piece of imitation lace to replace the hideous red cotton coverlet, and he picked out a pair of blue satin slippers; the only thing holding him back in his purchases was the fear of appearing crude; he brought everything back to the apartment—and then, with as much devotion as someone decorating an altar, he rearranged the furniture, hung curtains, placed heather on the mantel and violets on the chest of drawers; if he could, he would have covered the whole apartment in gold. "It's tomorrow," he said to himself, "tomorrow! And I'm not dreaming." He felt his heart beating rapidly in the delirium of his hope; then, when everything was ready, he put the key in his pocket, as if the pleasure that lay sleeping there might have been able to fly away.

At his place, he found a letter from his mother waiting for him.

Why this long absence? Your behavior is beginning to look ridiculous. I understand that to some degree you were hesitant at first about this marriage; but now, please use your head!

She went on to detail the sum in question: an income of forty-five thousand francs. As for other sums, "they could talk it over." Monsieur Roque wanted a definitive answer. And as for the young lady, her position was becoming truly embarrassing. "She loves you very much."

Frédéric tossed the letter aside without finishing it, and he opened another, this one from Deslauriers.

Old friend,
The pear is ripe.[124] *We're counting on you and the promise you made. We'll be meeting tomorrow at dawn in the Place du Panthéon. Go into the Café Soufflot. I need to speak with you before the demonstration.*

"Oh I know these demonstrations of theirs! Thank you very much, but I have a much more pleasant appointment to keep."

The next day at about eleven, Frédéric went out. He wanted to stop by and check one more time on his preparations; besides—who knew?—she might even come early because of one thing or another. Coming out of the Rue Tronchet, he could hear a great, confused sound coming from behind the Madeleine; he kept walking; and soon he saw, on the other side of the square, on the left, a group of workingmen in smocks and others in middle-class garb.

A manifesto had been published in the papers, calling for all those who had subscribed to the reformist banquet to meet at this spot. The Ministry almost immediately issued orders forbidding the meeting. The previous evening, the parliamentary opposition had abandoned the idea of the meeting; but the patriots, not having been told anything about their leaders' decision, came to the meeting, and their numbers were swelled by many spectators. A deputation from the schools had just gone to Odilon Barrot's house.[125] The deputation was now at the Office of Foreign Affairs, and it wasn't at all clear whether the banquet would be held or if the government would follow through

on its threats and bring in the National Guard. People were just as angry with the députés as they were with the government itself. The crowd was growing larger and larger, when suddenly the sound of the "Marseillaise" broke out.

It was being sung by the column of students filing into the square. They marched two abreast, keeping good order, no weapons in their hands but anger on their faces, and from time to time the chant would start up: "Long live Reform! Down with Guizot!"

Frédéric's friends were there—no doubt about that. They were bound to see him and drag him into it. He turned quickly to get away, heading down the Rue de l'Arcade.

When the students had circled the Madeleine twice, they went down toward the Place de la Concorde. It was packed with so many people that, from a distance, the crowd looked like a field of black corn swaying in the wind.

At the same time, infantry were lining up in battle form, over to the left of the church.

But the crowds stayed where they were. To put an end to all this, plainclothes policemen were seizing the most unruly demonstrators and dragging them brutally off. Frédéric, despite his indignation at the sight, said nothing; they might arrest him along with the others, and then he would miss Madame Arnoux.

Not long after that, the helmets of the municipal guard appeared. The guardsmen began laying about them, hitting people with the flat of their swords. A horse fell; people rushed to help; and then, once the horseman was back in the saddle, they all fled.

Then came a long silence. The fine drizzle that had wet the asphalt now stopped. Clouds chased overhead, being swept along by the west wind.

Frédéric began walking up and down the Rue Tronchet, looking before and behind.

Two o'clock tolled.

"This is it!" he said to himself; "she's leaving the house, and getting closer"; then, a minute later: "She could have arrived by now." When three o'clock struck, he tried to stay calm.

"No, she's not really late; just have a little patience!"

And to pass the time, he looked at the few shops on the street: a bookstore, a saddle shop, and a funeral parlor. Before long he knew

the title of every single book, the various sorts of harness, and the right material for mourning. The merchants, seeing him go back and forth so many times, were surprised at first, then alarmed, and soon they lowered their shutters.

Clearly, something must have come up, and she must be suffering the same way as he. But then—think of the joy they'd have in a little while! Because she was going to come, that was certain! "She promised, after all!" Even so, he was beginning to feel an intolerable anxiety.

Then he made an absurd move, going up into the rented room, as if she had known of it and might be there. But then, at that very moment, she could be out on the street—so he rushed back out. No one! And he went back to pacing up and down the street again.

He looked intently at the cracks between the paving stones, the mouths of the drainpipes, the street lamps, the numbers above the doors. The smallest objects became companions to him—or, rather, ironic spectators; and the uniform facades of the buildings looked pitiless to him. His feet were getting cold. He felt as if he were dissolving, utterly overwhelmed. The echo of his footsteps made his head ache.

When he checked his watch and saw that it was four o'clock, he felt dizzy, as if he were about to faint. He tried repeating verses, calculating a sum, thinking up a story. Impossible! The image of Madame Arnoux was always before him. He felt like running to meet her. But what route could he take without the risk of missing her?

He stopped a messenger, put five francs into his hand, and told him to go to the Rue Paradis, to the home of Jacques Arnoux, and to ask the porter there "if madame was home." Then he stationed himself at the corner of the Rue de la Ferme and the Rue de Tronchet, so he could see in both directions. Down at the far end, on the boulevard, he could see confused masses in motion. Sometimes he could make out the plume on a dragoon's helmet, or a woman's hat, and he squinted, trying to see better. A street child in rags, carrying a marmot in a cage, smiled and asked him for some money.

The man in the velvet jacket returned. "The porter didn't see her leave." What was keeping her? If she were sick, they would have said. Was there some unexpected visitor? But she could easily have turned the person away. He slapped his forehead.

"I'm a fool! It's the riot!" It was a natural explanation, and it soothed him. Then, suddenly: "But things are quiet in her neighborhood."

Now an abominable doubt occurred to him. "What if she never planned to come at all? What if her promise was just a way of getting rid of me? No, no!" What was keeping her was probably just something unforeseen, one of those things that sometimes happens. In that case, she would have written. He sent the boy from the apartment building to his place on the Rue Rumford to find out if there had been a letter for him.

There had been no letter. The absence of news reassured him.

The number of coins in his hand—the way passersby looked—the color of passing horses: he tried to find omens in all of these; and when the augury seemed negative, he forced himself not to believe in it. In his rage against Madame Arnoux, he cursed her under his breath. Then a wave of weakness would make him fear he was about to faint, and then suddenly there were reasons to hope again. She was going to come. She was there now, just behind him. He turned—nothing! Once he caught sight of a woman about thirty paces away who seemed to be about her size, wearing the same dress she wore. He came up beside her: it wasn't she! Five o'clock struck! Five-thirty! Six o'clock! The gas lamps were lit. Madame Arnoux had not come.

She had dreamed, the night before, that she was standing for a long time on the Rue Tronchet. She was waiting for something, something uncertain but something important, and though she didn't know why, she was afraid of being seen. But a nasty little dog was tenaciously biting and chewing at the hem of her dress. He wouldn't leave her alone, and his barking was getting even louder. Madame Arnoux awoke, but the dog's barking continued. It was coming from her son's bedroom. In her bare feet, she hurried in. The sound was coming from the child, who was coughing. His hands were burning hot, his face red, and his voice strangely hoarse. He was having greater and greater difficulty breathing. She stayed with him till dawn, leaning down over his bed and watching him.

At eight o'clock, the drums of the National Guard signaled Monsieur Arnoux that his friends were waiting for him. He dressed quickly and went out, promising to call on their doctor, Monsieur Colot, on the way. At ten o'clock Monsieur Colot had not come, and Madame Arnoux sent her maid. The doctor was away on a trip in the country, and the young man standing in for him was making his rounds.

Eugène held his head tilted to one side on the bolster, his face frowning, his nostrils dilated; his poor little face was paler than his sheets; and his breath was getting shallower all the time, drier, and more metallic sounding. His coughs sounded like the barking of cheap mechanical dogs.

Madame Arnoux was in a panic. She rang all the bells, calling out for help, and shouting: "A doctor! A doctor!"

Ten minutes later an old man with a white cravat and neatly trimmed grey whiskers appeared. He asked a lot of questions about the habits, the age, and the temperament of the sick boy, then examined his throat, put his ear to his back, and wrote a prescription. The perfectly calm manner of the gentleman was infuriating. He smelled of an embalming room. She wanted to strike him. He said he would come back that evening.

Then the terrible coughing fits began again. Sometimes the child would jerk upright all of a sudden. Convulsive movements rippled across the muscles of his chest, and as he breathed in, his stomach would contract, as if he were out of breath after running hard. Then his head would fall back, and he would lie with his mouth agape. Taking infinite precautions, Madame Arnoux tried to get him to swallow the contents of the medicine bottles, ipecacuanha syrup and an antimony potion. But he pushed the spoon away, moaning feebly. It was as if his words were gasped rather than spoken.

From time to time she reread the prescription. The contents of the formula frightened her; what if the pharmacist had made a mistake? Her impotence made her desperate. Monsieur Colot's student arrived.

He was a young, modest-looking man, new to the profession and not trying to hide his reactions. At first he was undecided, afraid of making a mistake; finally he prescribed ice packs. It took a long while to find some ice. Then the bladder holding the ice pieces broke. They had to change Eugène's shirt. All these new disturbances provoked a new, even more terrible fit.

Now the child started tearing the bandages from around his neck, as if trying to rid himself of the impediment that was choking him, and he clawed at the wall, clutched at his bed curtains, trying to find something steady that he could hold onto, something that would help him breathe. His face had turned a bluish gray, and his whole body, drenched in sweat, seemed to be shrinking. His haggard eyes were

fixed on his mother in terror. He thrust his arms around her neck and hung onto her desperately; and she, trying to repress her sobs, stammered out tender phrases: "Oh, my little love! My angel, my treasure!"

Then came a few moments of calm.

She went off to find some of his toys, a puppet, a picture book, and spread them out on his bed, trying to distract him. She even tried singing to him.

She began a song she used to sing to him when she was rocking and swaddling him on this same small tapestry chair. But his body shuddered mightily down its whole length, like a wave being pushed by the wind; his eyes bulged out; she thought he was going to die, and she turned away not to look at him.

A second later, she found the strength to look at him. He was still alive. The hours passed, the heavy, dark, somber, interminable, depressing hours; she counted the minutes solely by the progression of his agony. The spasms in his chest hurled him forward, so strong they seemed about to break him up; finally, he vomited up something strange, something that looked like a tube of parchment. What was it? She feared he had torn something loose inside himself. But now he was breathing normally, regularly. This appearance of sudden health terrified her more than all the rest; she was sitting there as if petrified, her arms hanging loose, her eyes fixed, when Monsieur Colot arrived. The child, he said, was no longer in danger.

At first she didn't understand, and she made him say it again. Wasn't this one of those consoling things doctors were supposed to say? The doctor left, seemingly pleased with the outcome. But for her, it was as if the cords that bound her heart had come loose.

"No longer in danger! Can it be?"

Suddenly the image of Frédéric came to her, clear and inexorable. This was a warning from Providence. But the Lord, in His mercy, didn't want to punish her that badly! And what expiation would be required of her, later on, if she were to continue with this love affair? Perhaps someone would insult her son, because of her; and Madame Arnoux could picture her young man brought home on a stretcher, wounded in a duel and dying. She jumped up and flung herself down on the little chair; and with all her strength she sent up her soul to the heavens, offering it to God as a burnt offering, the sacrifice of her first passion, of her only weakness.

Frédéric had returned home. He remained in his easy chair, too exhausted even to curse her. He fell into a kind of sleep; and within his nightmare he could hear the rain falling, believing that he was still out there on the street.

The next day, in one more fit of cowardice, he sent another messenger to Madame Arnoux's.

Whether because the man didn't bother to go, or because she was too busy to give him a reply, he brought back the same response. This was simply too rude! His pride rose up in rage. He swore he would never again feel any desire for her; and like a leaf whirled off in a storm, his love was gone. He felt soothed, felt a stoic kind of joy, and then a need for some violent action; he walked out into the streets with no destination in mind.

Men from the faubourgs were walking along, armed with rifles or old sabers, some of them in red hats, all singing the "Marseillaise" or the "Girondins."[126] Here and there a National Guardsman could be seen hurrying off to his town hall. Drums were beating off in the distance. There was fighting at the Porte Saint-Martin. There was something lively, something warlike in the air. Frédéric kept on walking. He found the disturbances in the city exhilarating.

Near Frascati's,[127] he caught sight of the Marshal's windows; a wild idea came to him, something typical of a young man. He crossed the boulevard.

They were closing the main gate; and Delphine, the maid, was in the process of writing on it, in charcoal, "arms have been surrendered." She said to him, excitedly, "Oh, madame is in quite a state! She fired her groom this morning, after he insulted her. She thinks they're going to be looting everywhere! She's scared half to death—and even more because monsieur is gone!"

"Which monsieur?"

"The prince!"

Frédéric walked into her boudoir. The Marshal was there, in her petticoat, her hair loose and hanging down her back, clearly overwhelmed.

"Ah, thank you! You've come to rescue me! For the second time! And you never demand any payment!"

"Well, I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, as he seized her around the waist.

"What's this? What are you doing?" the Marshal stammered, both surprised and delighted by this new behavior.

He replied, "I'm following the new fashion—I'm reforming."

She let herself be pushed back onto the divan, and she kept on laughing under his kisses.

They spent the afternoon at the window, watching the people down in the street. Then he took her to dinner at the Trois-Frères-Provençaux. They had a long, exquisite meal. There were no cabs to be had, so they came back on foot.

With the news of a change in the government, Paris was transformed. Everyone was in high spirits; people were out strolling around, and the lights strung outside the windows made the evening as bright as day. Soldiers were making their way back to their barracks, looking harassed and unhappy. People saluted them, calling out, "Long live the infantry!" They marched on, without responding. But in the National Guard, on the contrary, the officers, red-faced with enthusiasm, brandished their sabers, calling out: "Long live Reform!" Every time the two lovers heard that phrase, they started to laugh. Frédéric made clever remarks, playful and lighthearted.

Going along the Rue Duphot, they came out onto the boulevards. Chinese lanterns, hung from the houses, formed garlands of fire. A great mass of people was swarming down below; in among them, bayonets glittered, white against the dark mass of people. Then a great din arose. The crowd was too densely packed for them to be able to return directly; and they had turned into the Rue Caumartin when suddenly, behind them, a noise broke out, sounding like the crackling a large piece of silk makes when it's torn in two. It was the fusillade on the Boulevard des Capucines.[128]

"Ah! They must be killing off a few bourgeois," Frédéric said calmly, for there are situations in which a man, even the least cruel, has become so detached from others that he could watch the destruction of the entire human race without so much as batting an eye.

The Marshal, clinging tightly to his arm, her teeth chattering, declared she couldn't walk another twenty yards. This was when, in a refinement of the hatred he felt, and to insult the memory of Madame Arnoux, he brought the Marshal to the apartment on the Rue Tronchet, the place prepared for another.

The flowers were still fresh. The lace was spread out across the bed. He took the little slippers out of the armoire. Rosanette found all these little attentions very thoughtful.

Around one o'clock, she was awakened by a distant rumbling; and she saw that he was weeping, his face buried in the pillow.

"What's wrong, dear one?"

"I'm just too happy," said Frédéric. "I've wanted you for too long!"

PART III

I

The sudden sound of gunfire roused Frédéric; and despite Rosanette's pleadings, he was determined to go see what was happening. He went down toward the Champs-Élysées, where the shots had originated. At the corner of the Rue Saint-Honoré he met some men in smocks, who called out to him: "No—not that way! To the Palais-Royal!"

Frédéric followed them. The railings of the Assumption had been torn off.[1] Farther on, he noticed three paving stones lying in the middle of the street, probably the beginnings of a barricade, and shards from broken bottles and bales of wire intended to trip up cavalry; all of a sudden, a pale young man came running out of a side street, his long black hair floating over his shoulders, wearing a kind of vest with colored dots. He carried a long infantry rifle as he ran along on tiptoe, looking like a sleepwalker, yet lithe as a tiger. Now and then explosions could be heard.

The previous evening, the sight of a cart hauling five dead bodies picked up from among those on the Boulevard des Capucines had dramatically changed the mood of the people;[2] and while one aide-de-camp succeeded another at the Tuileries, and while Monsieur Molé, in the process of putting together a new cabinet, failed to return, and while Monsieur Thiers was busy trying to put together a different one, and while the king dithered, giving Bugeaud complete

powers, only to keep him from using them, the insurrection, as if directed by a single master hand, was becoming powerfully organized.[3] Frenzied, eloquent speakers stood on the street corners and worked up the crowds; others, in the churches, were vigorously ringing all the bells; people were melting down lead, making cartridges; the trees on the boulevards, the public urinals, the benches, the fences, the gas lamps were all ripped up or turned upside down; by the morning, Paris was covered with barricades. There wasn't much resistance; the National Guard intervened everywhere, so much so that by eight o'clock the people, either by persuasion or by force, had control of five barracks, almost every town hall, and all the most strategic points. The monarchy disintegrated swiftly, as if by itself; and now the crowds were attacking the guardhouse of the Château d'Eau, intent on freeing fifty prisoners who weren't there.

Frédéric was forcibly stopped from entering the square, filled with armed groups. Infantry companies occupied Rue Saint-Thomas and Rue Fromanteau. An enormous barricade blocked off the Rue de Valois. The smoke hanging over the top of the barricade dissipated, and men rushed at it, making grand gestures and then disappearing. The sounds of rifles began again. The guardhouse fired back, though no one could be seen inside; its windows, protected by oaken shutters, were pierced with firing loopholes; and the building—which had two stories and two wings, a fountain on the first floor, and a small door in the middle—was beginning to be riddled with white pockmarks where bullets had struck. The three steps of its front porch remained empty.

Next to Frédéric, a man wearing the red bonnet[4] and a cartridge belt over his wool jacket was arguing with a woman wearing a cotton kerchief in her hair. She was saying, "Come back! Come back!"

"Leave me alone!" the husband barked. "You can keep an eye on the house by yourself. Look, Citizen, is this fair? I did my duty in 1830, and again in '32, in '34, and in '39! So today there's fighting—and that means I have to fight! Go away!"

The porter's wife finally gave in to his protests and to those of a National Guardsman standing near them, a forty-something man whose mild, pleasant face was fringed with a blond beard. He loaded his rifle and fired it even while talking with Frédéric, as calm and at ease in the midst of a riot as a gardener in his garden. A young boy

in a shop apron was begging him for some caps so he could fire his weapon, a fine hunting carbine given to him by "a gentleman."

"Grab some from behind me," said the bourgeois, "and then get out of here! You'll get yourself killed!"

Drums beat the charge. Shrill cries and triumphant shouts rose up. The mob continued to surge, now this way and now that. Frédéric, caught between two densely packed groups, stood still, completely fascinated and enormously entertained. The wounded who fell, the dead stretched out along the ground, didn't seem like real wounded people or like real corpses. It was like watching a show.

Amid the swell of the crowd, over their heads, he could see an old man in a black coat astride a white horse with a velvet saddle. In one hand he held a green branch, and in the other a sheet of paper, and he kept stubbornly brandishing them both. Eventually, he gave up all hope of making himself heard, and he left.

The infantry troops had disappeared, and now only the municipal guards remained defending the house. A surge of fearless men rushed the steps; they fell, and others followed; and the door echoed with the sound of iron bars battering against it; but the municipal guards maintained their posts. Then a carriage packed with hay and set alight, like a giant torch, was pushed up against the walls. People rushed to bring wood, straw, and even a barrel of alcohol. The fire rose up all along the stone walls; the building began to smoke all over, like a sulphur spring; and up at the top, huge flames were crackling and shooting out between the balustrades around the terrace. National Guardsmen were crowded onto the first floor of the Palais-Royal. Rifle fire broke out from every window around the square; bullets whistled; the fountain had been damaged, and its water, mixed with blood, left puddles on the square; people slipped on the mud on clothes, shakos, weapons; Frédéric felt something soft under his feet: it was the hand of a sergeant in a gray overcoat, laid out face down in the gutter. New groups of people kept arriving, pushing the fighters on into the station. The shots were coming more rapidly. The wine shops were open; people dropped in from time to time to smoke a pipe or have a quick beer before getting back to the fight. A lost dog was howling. It raised a laugh.

Frédéric was startled by the shock of a man falling against him; the man groaned, a bullet in his back. The shot might have been aimed at

him, and that made him furious; and he was hurrying forward when a National Guardsman stopped him.

"Don't go—no point in it. The king just left. All right—if you don't believe me, go see for yourself."

Hearing this calmed Frédéric down. The Place du Carrousel seemed to be quiet. The Hôtel de Nantes stood there still, all on its own; and the houses behind it, the dome of the Louvre ahead of it, the long wooden gallery on the right, and the open land that stretched as far as the booths of the shopkeepers, all seemed steeped in the gray air, in which distant sounds seemed to blend together in the mist—but at the other end of the Place, a harsher light came in through a gap in the clouds onto the façade of the Tuileries, turning all the windows a bright white. A dead horse lay stretched out on the ground near the Arc de Triomphe. Behind the railings, groups of five or six stood around talking. The doors of the palace stood open; servants in the doorways were letting people in.

Down below, in a small room, bowls of café au lait were being served. Some of the curious sat down at tables and made jokes; others remained standing, and among them, a cab driver. He seized, with both hands, a jar filled with powdered sugar, looked anxiously around from left to right, and then proceeded, ravenously, to eat it, his nose plunged right into the neck of the jar. At the base of the staircase, a man was writing his name in the register. Frédéric recognized him from behind.

"Hey! Hussonnet!"

"It's me, all right," said the bohemian. "I was just introducing myself to the court. Quite a comedy going on, eh?"

"Should we go upstairs?"

They went up to the Hall of Marshals. Portraits of all those great men remained intact except for that of Bugeaud, which had been pierced in the stomach. The others all stood there, leaning on their swords, artillery behind them, striking formidable poses, which seemed a little absurd given the current situation. A big standing clock indicated it was twenty minutes past one.

Suddenly the "Marseillaise" broke out. Hussonnet and Frédéric leaned over the banister. The People had arrived. They swarmed up over the staircases in a dizzying flood of bare heads, caps, red bonnets, bayonets, and shoulders, surging so impetuously that people

disappeared in the teeming mass, which kept on ascending, like a springtime tide that pushes back a river, an irresistible force with a deep roar. At the top of the stairs, the flood stopped, and the singing trailed off.

Now all that could be heard was the shuffling of footsteps; instead of a roaring wave, there were only the lapping sounds of quieter voices. The inoffensive crowd was content merely to look around. But from time to time an elbow, needing a little more space, would break a window pane; or a vase, or perhaps a statuette, would roll off a table onto the floor. The woodwork, under unfamiliar pressure, made creaking sounds. Every face seemed red, sweat rolling off them in big drops; Hussonnet remarked, "Heroes don't smell so good!"

"Oh, come on!" said Frédéric.

Pushed along by the crowd despite themselves, they entered a room with a red velvet canopy stretched across the ceiling. Below it, a working-class man with a black beard sat on the throne, his shirt half open, clearly thinking this was hilarious, grinning stupidly like an ape.[5] Others scrambled up onto the platform to take his place.

"There's the great myth!" said Hussonnet. "There you see it—the sovereign People!"

The throne was picked up, rocking as it passed from one pair of hands to another all across the room.

"Damn! Look at it sway! The ship of state, pitching around on a stormy sea! Look at it dance—it's doing the cancan!"

They had carried it over to a window, and while the crowd hissed and booed, they threw it out.

"Poor old thing!" said Hussonnet, watching it fall down into the garden, where it was quickly picked up to be carried to the Bastille and then burned.

Then a frantic joy broke out, as if there, in the place where the throne had been, a future of unlimited happiness had just appeared; and the people, not so much out of vengeance as out of a need to affirm their ownership, began to break and shatter and tear to pieces the windows, curtains, chandeliers, candelabra, the tables, chairs, stools, all the furniture right down to the albums of drawings and the needlework baskets. When you've won, you might as well have fun! The mob draped themselves mockingly in lace and cashmeres. Gold fringes were wrapped around the sleeves of smocks, hats with

ostrich feathers adorned the heads of blacksmiths, and ribbons of the Legion of Honor were turned into sashes for prostitutes. Everyone indulged his or her whims; some danced, while others drank. In the queen's bedroom, a woman was making her hair shine with pomade; behind a screen, a couple of gaming enthusiasts were playing cards; Hussonnet pointed out to Frédéric an individual who was leaning over a balcony and smoking his clay pipe; the delirium redoubled, accompanied by the sound of china and crystal being shattered, making tinkling sounds as it fell, like the keys of a glass harmonica.

Then the wildness grew darker. An obscene curiosity led the mob to rifle through all the closets, all the alcoves, to open every drawer. Ex-convicts thrust their arms into the beds of princesses, rolling around on them as consolation for not being able to rape the women. Others, with even more sinister looks, wandered silently everywhere, intent on stealing something; but the multitude was simply too large. Looking through the open doors down the long corridor of apartments, all that could be seen was the dark, swarming mass of people among the gilded carvings, half obscured by clouds of dust. Everyone was gasping for breath; the heat was becoming ever more stifling; the two friends, afraid of being suffocated, left.

In the entrance hall, standing up on a heap of clothing, they saw a prostitute posing like a statue representing Liberty—she stood stock still, her big eyes wide open, looking terrifying.

They had just barely got outside when a platoon of municipal guards in overcoats came toward them; they took off their policemen's hats, uncovering their balding heads, and made a low bow to the people. This mark of respect filled the ragged victors with pride. And Hussonnet and Frédéric could not help but feel some pleasure at the sight too.

Both of them were wound up. They returned to the Palais-Royal. Passing the Rue Fromanteau, they saw the corpses of soldiers piled up on a bed of straw. They walked by impassively, even proud of themselves for showing no feeling.

The Palais was teeming with people. In the inner courtyard, seven bonfires were burning. From the windows, people were throwing out pianos, chests of drawers, and clocks. Fire engines were there, spraying water up as high as the roofs. Some troublemakers were trying to cut the hoses with their swords. Frédéric tried to get a military

cadet to intervene. The cadet couldn't understand him; he seemed to be an imbecile. All around, in the two galleries, the mob, having got into the wine cellars, was abandoning itself to a, complete, horrifying self-indulgence. Wine flowed in streams, soaking people's feet, and hoodlums were drinking out of the bottoms of broken bottles, shouting abuse as they staggered around.

"Let's get out of here," said Hussonnet. "These people make me sick."

Wounded men lay on the floor the whole length of the Orléans gallery; they were on mattresses, using red curtains as blankets. Women from the neighborhood were bringing them soup and linen.

"I don't care what you think!" said Frédéric. "I happen to think the people are sublime."

The entrance hall was filled with a churning crowd of furious people; some wanted to get up to the higher levels to destroy even more; National Guardsmen on the staircase tried to force them back. The bravest Guardsman was a rifleman, bareheaded, his hair disheveled and his leather outfit in tatters. His shirt bulged out between his trousers and his jacket, and he was struggling desperately among the other guards. Hussonnet, who was sharp-sighted, recognized Arnoux from a distance.

They went back to the Tuileries garden in order to breathe more freely. They sat down on a bench and stayed there for several minutes, their eyes closed, so exhausted they didn't have the strength to speak. Passersby around them stopped each other to talk. The Duchesse d'Orléans had been named Regent[6]; it was all over, and here in the garden they were all experiencing that pleasurable feeling that succeeds the resolution of some crisis when the palace servants suddenly appeared at the windows, tearing up their livery. They threw the scraps down into the garden as a symbol of their repudiation. The people booed them. They went back inside.

Frédéric and Hussonnet had their attention diverted by a tall man striding swiftly among the trees, a rifle on his shoulder. He had a cartridge belt strapped around his red jacket and a kerchief wrapped around his head, under his hat. He turned his head. It was Dussardier; he threw himself into their arms.

"Oh, what a great day, my poor old friends!" he said, and couldn't manage anything further, he was so out of breath with joy and fatigue.

He had been up for the past forty-eight hours. He had worked on the barricades in the Latin Quarter, had fought on the Rue Rambuteau, had saved the lives of three dragoons, and had entered the Tuileries with Dunoyer's column, and events after that had taken him to the Chambre des Députés and then to the Hôtel de Ville.

"I just got back from there! Everything's going well! The People are victorious! Workers and bourgeois are embracing each other! Oh, if you'd only seen what I've seen! What fine men! It's all so beautiful!" And, without noticing that neither of them was armed: "I was sure I'd find you here! It was rough for a moment or two, but that doesn't matter now!"

A drop of blood trickled down his cheek, and when the others questioned him about it: "Oh, it's nothing! Just a little scratch from a bayonet."

"Still, you ought to have it looked at."

"Bah! I'm tough enough. Besides, what does it matter? The Republic has been proclaimed! We're going to be happy now! I overheard some journalists just now saying that we'll go on to liberate Poland and Italy! No more kings—can you believe it? Freedom everywhere! Freedom everywhere!"

And sweeping his eyes over the entire horizon, he held up his arms in a gesture of triumph. But then a long stream of men came running along the terrace, following the riverbank.

"Damn, I forgot! The forts are still occupied. I have to go! *Adieu!*"

He turned back to face them once more, brandishing his rifle: "Long live the Republic!"

Huge billows of black smoke were pouring out of the palace chimneys, and sparks along with them. Bells were tolling off in the distance, sounding like the terrified bleating of sheep. To the left, to the right, everywhere the victors were firing off their guns. Though Frédéric was no warrior, the Gallic blood within him was aroused. He had caught the magnetic ardor of the crowd. Voluptuously, he breathed in the stormy air, thick as it was with the scent of gunpowder; and at the same time he trembled, feeling the waves of an immense love, a supreme, universal tenderness, as if the heart of all humanity were beating within his breast.

Hussonnet yawned and said, "Well, I guess it's time I got busy educating the populace!"

Frédéric accompanied him to his office on the Place de la Bourse, where he sat down and wrote up a lyrical account of the night's events for the Troyes newspaper, a fine little piece—which he signed with his own name. Then they went off together to a tavern to eat. Hussonnet was thoughtful; the eccentricities of the Revolution outdid his own.

After coffee they went to the Hôtel de la Ville in search of news, and by then Hussonnet's inner joker was back. He clambered up the barricades like a chamois, and replied to the sentries with bawdy but patriotic jokes.

They stood in the glare of torchlight and listened to the Provisional Government being proclaimed.[7] It was midnight when an exhausted Frédéric got back to his home.

"Well," he asked his manservant while the latter was undressing him, "are you pleased?"

"Oh yes, monsieur! But what I don't like is the sight of the mob marching along together like that."

When he got up the next morning, Frédéric thought of Deslauriers, and he rushed over to see him. But the lawyer had just left, having been made a commissioner in the provinces. The previous evening, he had managed to get in to see Ledru-Rollin,[8] and by dint of harping on his connection to the law school, had succeeded in clawing a job from him. The porter said that in any case, he would be writing within the next week to give his new address.

Frédéric then went to see the Marshal. She greeted him with some bitterness, still angry over his abandoning her. But her anger dissipated when he repeatedly assured her that everything would be peaceful now. Everything was calm now, and there was nothing to fear; he kissed her; and she declared herself in favor of the Republic—as had Monseigneur the archbishop of Paris, and as, with remarkable rapidity, would the Magistrature, the Council of State, the Institute, the Marshals of France, Changarnier, Monsieur de Falloux, all the bonapartists, all the legitimists, and quite a few Orléanists.[9]

The monarchy had fallen so swiftly that, once the initial astonishment had passed, there was a kind of widespread surprise among the bourgeois to find themselves still living. The summary execution of a few thieves—shot down without a trial—was seen as an act of perfect justice. For at least a month, everyone kept repeating Lamartine's words about the red flag, "which had only been carried around the

Champ de Mars, whereas the tricolor flag," etc.[10]; and everybody wrapped themselves in the flag, each faction seeing only its own color among the three—and quietly promising itself that, when it gained power, the other two would be ripped out.

Since business was in effect suspended, everyone had come out of their houses, either out of anxiety or just the desire to gawk. The general informality of dress elided class distinctions, so hatreds were hidden away for the moment, hope was everywhere, and the crowds were in a gentler frame of mind. Every face showed pride in having won a hard-fought right. There was a carnival air, a feeling that was something like camping out; there was nothing more charming than Paris in those first days.

With the Marshal on Frédéric's arm, the two of them went strolling through the streets. She was delighted by the rosettes in nearly every buttonhole, the flags hung from every window, the posters of every possible color stuck up on the walls, and she paused here and there to throw some coins into a collection box for the wounded that was set up on a chair in the middle of the road. She stopped to look at the caricatures of Louis-Philippe as a pastry chef, an acrobat, a dog, or a leech. But Caussidière's men frightened her, with their swords and their sashes.[11] At times they saw a Liberty Tree being planted. The clergy eagerly participated in the ceremony, escorted by servants wearing gold stripes, giving their blessing to the Republic; the crowd loved it. The most common sight was one deputation or another, representing every group imaginable, on its way to present a petition at the Hôtel de Ville—for every trade, every industry was waiting for the new government to put an end to all its problems. Some, true, went there simply to offer their congratulations, or to have a look and see how things worked.

About the middle of March, Frédéric was crossing the Pont d'Arcole, on his way to the Latin Quarter to do an errand for Rosanette, when he saw coming toward him a column of men wearing bizarre hats and long beards. Leading them on was an African, a former artist's model, now beating a drum; their banner, bearing the words "Artist Painters," was carried by none other than Pellerin.

He signaled Frédéric to wait, and then came back five minutes later, saying that he had some extra time because the government

was occupied just then with a deputation of stonemasons. He and his colleagues were going to ask to have a Forum for Artists created, which would function as a sort of stock exchange involving questions of aesthetics; sublime works of genius would no doubt result from the artists all sharing their genius. Soon Paris would be covered with gigantic monuments; he would decorate them; in fact he'd already begun working on a painting of the Republic. One of his comrades came back to fetch him, because a deputation of poultry farmers was right on their heels.

"Ridiculous!" a voice in the crowd growled. "Always trivia, never anything worthwhile!"

It was Regimbart. He didn't greet Frédéric, but he did take the opportunity to vent his bitterness.

The Citizen spent his days wandering the streets, pulling on his moustache, rolling his eyes, and picking up and then spreading dismal bits of news; he had only two pet phrases: "Careful, or we'll be outflanked!" and "Good God, they're going to snatch away the Republic!" He was unhappy about everything, and especially about the fact that France hadn't taken back her natural borders. Hearing Lamartine's name made him shrug his shoulders. He didn't think Ledru-Rollin was "up to the challenge," called Dupont (of the Eure) an old fool, Albert an idiot, Louis Blanc, a Utopian, and Blanqui "extremely dangerous." When Frédéric asked him what he thought they ought to have done, he gripped his arm as tightly as if he wanted to break it and said, "Take back the Rhine, I tell you! Take back the Rhine, dammit!"

Then he started in on the reactionaries.

They were showing their true colors. The sacking of the castles of Neuilly and Suresnes, the fire at Batignolles, the troubles in Lyon—all those excesses, all those grievances were being exaggerated.[12] They complained too about Ledru-Rollin's circular, the forced issuing of banknotes, the fall in government bonds to sixty francs, and above all, the supreme iniquity, the very summit of horror, the forty-five centime tax![13] And on top of all that, there was socialism! Now the fact was that all these theories were about as new as Mother Goose, and there'd been enough books published debating and discussing them to fill a library, but they terrified the bourgeois as much as meteorites hurtling down upon Earth, giving rise to the kind of hatred that any idea arouses just because it is an idea, and this kind of execration

ended up glorifying the idea, and no matter how mediocre the idea itself actually is, ensuring its victory.

Property had become virtually a religion, and had become practically identical with God. Attacking property was almost a sacrilege, as horrible as cannibalism. And despite the most humane legislation ever passed, the specter of 1793 kept reappearing, and the chopping sound of the guillotine could be heard in every syllable of the word "republic"—though this didn't keep anybody from despising the new government for being weak. France, finding itself without a master, took to crying in terror, like a blind man who's lost his cane, or a child who's lost his nursemaid.

The man who trembled the most, of all men in France, was Monsieur Dambreuse. The new state of things not only threatened his fortune but, worse, contradicted everything he knew to be true. Such a good, solid system, and such a good, wise king! Was it possible? The world was surely about to end! The very next day he dismissed three servants, sold off his horses, and bought a soft hat (for walking in the streets); he even considered whether he ought to grow a beard; and he stayed at home, listless, bitterly reading the newspapers most hostile to his ideas, becoming so gloomy that not even the jokes about Flocon's pipe could make him smile.[14]

As a supporter of the previous reign, he was afraid that the People might take their vengeance on his properties in Champagne; then he happened upon Frédéric's journalistic effusion. This made him imagine that his young friend was a person of influence, someone who might be of service to him, or at least to defend him; and thus one morning Monsieur Dambreuse, accompanied by Martinon, appeared at Frédéric's home.

His only purpose in coming, he said, was to see Frédéric and chat a bit. The fact was, he was simply delighted with the recent events, and he'd taken to heart "the sublime formulation, 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,'" having always been a Republican at heart. If he had voted in favor of the former regime, with the ministry, why, that was solely in order to hasten its inevitable downfall. He went so far as to inveigh against Monsieur Guizot, "who managed to land us in a real mess, there's no doubt about that!" But on the other hand, there was Lamartine, whom he admired greatly, and who had shown himself to be "magnificent, word of honor, when he said, with regard to the red flag—"

"Yes, I know!" said Frédéric.

Monsieur Dambreuse went on to declare his sympathy with the workers.

"Because, after all, we're all workers, more or less." He went on to exaggerate his impartiality so far as to suggest that Proudhon had some good points. "What am I saying? Many good points!" Then, revealing the kind of detachment that marks the superior intellect, he turned to talking about the exhibition where he had seen Pellerin's painting, which struck him as quite original, very well handled.

Martinon urged him on with approving remarks; he too thought that we really all ought to "rally openly to the Republic," and he talked about his working-class father, playing the peasant, the man of the people. Soon they moved on to the upcoming elections for the National Assembly, and the candidates in the Forterelle region.[15] The opposition candidate didn't stand a chance.

"You ought to take his place!" exclaimed Dambreuse.

Frédéric protested.

"But why not?"—because he could count on the votes of the extreme left because of his convictions, and those of the conservatives because of his family. "And also because," the banker added with a smile, "I might have a little influence."

Frédéric objected that he had no idea how to go about it. The easiest thing in the world: All he had to do was get himself recommended to the patriots of the Aube département by a club in Paris.[16] Frédéric should draw up a speech that would go beyond the tired old professions of faith and contain some serious discussion of principles.

"Bring it to me—I know what'll work with people down there! And, again, you could render good service to your country, to all of us, even to me."

In times like these, people ought to help each other, and if Frédéric needed something, well, either he, or one of his friends . . .

"Oh! Thank you so much, monsieur!"

"With the understanding that you'd do the same for me, of course."

No doubt about it: the banker was a fine fellow.

Frédéric couldn't help thinking about his advice; and before long, he was practically dizzy at the thought of it.

The great heroes from the Convention seemed to pass before his eyes. It seemed as if a wonderful new world was dawning. Rome, Vienna, Berlin were in revolt; the Austrians had been pushed out of

Venice; the whole of Europe was in ferment. The time was now for him to join the movement, perhaps even help accelerate it; moreover, he greatly admired the uniform people said the députés were going to be wearing. He could already see himself in a waistcoat with lapels and a tricolor sash; and this itch, this hallucination, became so powerful that he admitted it to Dussardier.

His fine young friend's enthusiasm hadn't weakened a bit.

"Of course you should do it! Go ahead and run!"

But Frédéric nevertheless wanted to consult Deslauriers. The idiotic opposition that the new commissioner had to face had only strengthened his liberalism. He immediately mailed his friend a violent screed.

Still, Frédéric felt the need of getting the approval of more people; and one day when Mademoiselle Vatnaz was there, he confided in Rosanette.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz was one of those unmarried Parisian women who each evening—after they've finished giving their lessons or trying to sell their little drawings or seeking a publisher for their impoverished manuscripts—come back home with mud on the hems of their skirts, make their dinner, eat it all alone, and then, their feet up on a footwarmer, in the light of a smoky lamp, dream of love, a family, a house, a fortune, everything they don't have. And so, like many others, she greeted the Revolution as the coming of vengeance—and she now pored frenziedly over socialist propaganda.

The emancipation of the proletariat, according to Mademoiselle Vatnaz, could only come with the emancipation of women. She called for women to be admitted to all kinds of employment, for paternity investigations, for a new set of laws, and for the abolition, or at least "a more intelligent regulation of" marriage. In that new system, every French woman would be required to marry a French man or adopt an old man. Wet nurses and midwives should be paid by the state; there should be a jury to examine works by women, special publishers for women, a national guard for women, everything for women! And since the government didn't recognize their rights, they would have to take them by force. Ten thousand female citizens with good rifles would make the Hôtel de Ville tremble!

Frédéric's candidacy seemed to fit well with her ideas. She encouraged him, suggesting that glory was just over the horizon. Rosanette

herself was delighted to have a man who would be speaking in the Chambre.

"And then, maybe, they'll give you a good position."

Frédéric—a man who possessed every weakness possible—was persuaded by the universal madness. He wrote a speech and went to show it to Monsieur Dambreuse.

At the sound of the main gate closing, a curtain was partly drawn back in one of the windows; a woman appeared. There wasn't enough time to make out who it was; but when he went into the entrance hall, a painting stopped him in his tracks: it was a painting by Pellerin, which had been placed on a chair, no doubt just temporarily.

It represented the Republic, or perhaps Progress, or Civilization, in the figure of Jesus Christ driving a locomotive through a virgin forest. Frédéric, after contemplating it for a moment, exclaimed, "How vile!"

"It is, isn't it?" said Monsieur Dambreuse, having heard the remark as he came in, imagining that Frédéric was referring not to the painting but to the doctrine it tried to glorify. Martinon came in just then too. They all went into the study; and Frédéric was pulling a sheet of paper out of his pocket when, suddenly, Mademoiselle Cécile walked in and asked, innocently, "Is my aunt here?"

"You know she isn't," said the banker. "But never mind! Make yourself at home, mademoiselle."

"Oh, no, thank you. I'm going."

When she had gone, Martinon looked as if he were trying to find his handkerchief. "I must have left it in my overcoat. Excuse me!"

"Of course!" said Monsieur Dambreuse.

Clearly, he had not been taken in by this little trick, and even seemed to encourage it. Why? But then Martinon soon reappeared, and Frédéric started in on his speech. On the second page, which argued that the dominance of financial interests was a shameful thing, the banker grimaced. Turning to reform, Frédéric called for free trade.

"What? . . . Allow me!"

But Frédéric, not hearing him, went on. He called for a tax on income, a progressive tax, a European federation, and universal education, along with the greatest possible encouragement for the fine arts. "If the nation were to pay men like Delacroix and Hugo a hundred thousand a year, what would be the harm?"

He concluded with advice to the upper classes: "Spare nothing, you wealthy ones! Give, and give some more!"

He stopped and remained standing; his two listeners, seated, said nothing; Martinon widened his eyes, while Monsieur Dambreuse had gone pale. Finally, hiding his feelings behind a bitter smile: "Your speech is perfect!" And he went on to praise the form extravagantly so as not to have to say anything about the content.

Such virulence on the part of an inoffensive young man frightened Monsieur Dambreuse, for he read it as a symptom. Martinon tried to reassure him. The conservative party, quiet so far, would surely have their revenge; several of the newly appointed commissioners had been driven out in different towns already; the elections were scheduled for April 23, so there was plenty of time; in short, the thing to do was for Monsieur Dambreuse himself to run for the seat in the Aube département; and from that moment on Martinon devoted himself entirely to him, became his secretary, and surrounded him with filial attentions.

Frédéric arrived at Rosanette's quite pleased with himself. Delmar was there and informed him "definitively" that he was going to run as a candidate in the Seine election. He had had a poster made, addressing "the People" by the familiar *tu* and boasting that he truly understood them, and that he had allowed himself to be "crucified by Art" for the sake of their salvation, for he was the very incarnation of the People, their ideal—and in fact he did believe that he had enormous influence over the masses, so much so that, later on, in a ministry office he offered to go out and put down a riot all by himself; asked what means he would employ for this, he replied, "Don't worry! I only need to show my face!"

To annoy him, Frédéric mentioned his own candidacy. Once the ham understood that his future colleague would be representing a province, he announced that he was at Frédéric's service and offered to show him around the clubs.

And they did go to them all, or nearly all—the reds and the blues, the wild and the tranquil, the puritans and the unkempt, the mystics and the drunks, the ones where the deaths of kings were declared, and the ones where cheating grocers were denounced; but everywhere, renters denounced landlords, smocks denounced suits, and the rich conspired against the poor. Quite a few hoped to press

charges, seeking to be indemnified for ill treatment by the police, while others were begging for money to begin work on their inventions, and there were plans for phalansteries,[17] projects involving village bazaars, systems to bring about public happiness—and yet, here and there a sudden lightning bolt of wit appeared amid clouds of stupidity, quick declarations splashed out, the law was concisely rendered in an oath, and flowers of eloquence bloomed on the lips of a working man wearing a sword belt across his bare chest. Sometimes, too, a gentleman would appear, an aristocrat pretending to be humble, making plebian remarks, hoping his unwashed hands would pass for callused ones. A patriot would recognize him, and the most virtuous would heap scorn upon him; and he would leave, rage seething in his heart. If you wanted to be known as a sensible person, the one thing you had to do was denigrate lawyers at every possible opportunity and make frequent use of certain locutions: "bringing my brick to the edifice," "social problems," "workshop."

Delmar never missed the chance to give a speech; and when he could find nothing more to say, his primary resource was to put his hand on his hip, slip his other arm inside his waistcoat, and turn his head sharply to one side, so as to display his profile best. This would result in applause, especially from Mademoiselle Vatnaz, sitting at the back of the hall.

But poor as the orators were, Frédéric didn't dare try to speak himself. The people in the audience always seemed too uncultured or too hostile.

But Dussardier asked around, and he announced that he'd found a club on the Rue Saint-Jacques called the Club de l'Intelligence. A name like that gives a man some hope. Besides, he'd get his friends to come along.

He brought the same group who had come to his punch party: the accountant, the traveling wine salesman, and the architect; even Pellerin came along, and Hussonnet said he might come; and on the sidewalk, in front of the door, stood Regimbart with a couple of men, one of whom was his faithful Compain, a rather squat type with pockmarks and red eyes; the other was built like an ape, extremely hairy, who was introduced only as being "a patriot from Barcelona."

They went down an alleyway which led to a large room, probably used as a carpenter's workshop, the walls of which were new and still

smelled of plaster. Four oil lamps were hung in a row, emitting a sickly light. At the far end of the room stood a platform with a desk and a bell atop it; a table below served as a rostrum, and there were two lower tables on either side for the secretaries. The audience on the benches consisted of aging painters, school monitors, and unpublished writers. Here and there a woman's hat or a worker's smock stood out along the rows of overcoats with greasy collars. The back of the room was full of workingmen who had wandered in for lack of anything better to do, or who had been brought along by the speakers to ensure applause.

Frédéric made sure to sit between Dussardier and Regimbart, who, as soon as he was seated, put his two hands on his cane, his chin on his two hands, and closed his eyes, while at the far end of the room Delmar was standing up, trying to dominate the scene.

Then the chairman's desk was occupied—by none other than Sénécal.

Good-natured Dussardier had thought this surprise would please Frédéric. It annoyed him.

The crowd showed great deference to the chairman. He had been one of those who, on February 25, had called for the immediate organization of labor; the next day, at the Prado,[18] he had spoken in favor of mounting an attack on the Hôtel de Ville; and since everybody of note models himself on some particular hero—some copying Saint-Just, some Danton, some Marat—he did all he could to imitate Blanqui,[19] who, in turn modeled himself on Robespierre. His black gloves and his close-cropped hair gave him an austere air, which was quite becoming.

He began the meeting with a reading of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, the usual pious ritual. Then a vigorous voice began reciting Béranger's *Memories of the People.*

Other voices shouted out: "No, no! Not that one!"

"'The Cap'!" somebody shouted from the back rows of patriots. And then they began to sing the little poem that was so popular then:

Hats off when you see the cap,
On your knees to the workingman![20]

At a word from the chairman, the audience fell silent. One of the secretaries began opening letters.

"Some young men write to say that every evening they burn a copy of *L'Assemblée nationale* in front of the Panthéon, and they urge all good patriots to follow their example."[21]

"Bravo! Motion carried!" the crowd responded.

"Citizen Jean-Jacques Langreneux, typographer, Rue Dauphine, would like to see a monument erected to the martyrs of Thermidor."[22]

"Michel-Évariste-Népomucène Vincent, an ex-professor, would like to see the new European Democracy adopt a common language. They might want to make use of a dead language, such as Latin in its most perfected form."

"No! No Latin!" exclaimed the architect.

"Why not?" asked a schoolmaster.

And those two gentlemen proceeded to debate the matter, while others joined in, each one trying to stand out with some exceptionally clever remark; but the whole business became so tedious that many people began walking out.

But a little old man, with a pair of green spectacles perched below his extraordinarily high forehead, asked to be given the floor to deliver an urgent communication.

This was a memorandum concerning the allocation of taxes. The numbers poured out—they would never end! The impatient audience began murmuring, even talking out loud with each other; but nothing would disturb the man. Then people started whistling and shouting out "Azor!"[23] Sénécal chastised the audience; the speaker kept right on, like a machine. To stop him, someone had to grab him by the arm. The respectable old man looked as if he'd been awakened from a dream, and, raising his spectacles: "Pardon me, citizens! I'll sit back down! My apologies!"

The failure of this reading unnerved Frédéric. He had his own speech in his pocket, but improvisation would have been much better.

Finally, the chairman announced that they were going to move on to important business, the question concerning the election. They would not be debating the lengthy lists of republicans. However, the Club de l'Intelligence had the same right as any other club to draw up its own list—"with respect to the grand pashas of the Hôtel de Ville"—and so, any citizens who aspired to be named should state their qualifications.

"Go on! Go on!" said Dussardier.

A man in a cassock, with kinky hair and an impetuous, excited look about him, had already raised his hand. He stuttered as he said his name was Ducretot, a priest and agronomist, and added that he was the author of a study titled *Manures.* He was told he ought to be speaking to a horticultural club.

Then a patriot in a smock jumped up onto the platform. This was a true plebeian, with broad shoulders and a fat but gentle-looking face. He cast a long, sweeping, almost voluptuous, glance around the room, threw back his head, and then, finally, stretched out his arms, saying, "O my brothers, you've rejected Ducretot! And you were right, but you didn't do it because you disrespect religion—no, we're all religious."

Several of them were listening intently, mouths open, looking like a set of catechumens, practically ecstatic.

"And you didn't do it because he was a priest—because, after all, we too, all of us, are priests! The workingman is a priest, just like the founder of socialism, our Lord Jesus Christ!"

And the time had surely come for the reign of God on earth to begin. The Gospel led straight to 1789! After the abolition of slavery, the abolition of the proletariat! The age of hate had come to an end, and it was now the age of love. "Christianity is the cornerstone, the foundation of the new edifice . . ."

"Are you serious?" shouted the wine salesman. "Why are we listening to an idiot like this?"

This interruption caused a great scandal. Almost everybody stood up on the benches, shaking their fists and calling out, "Atheist! Aristocrat! Dog!" while the chairman kept ringing his bell over and over, people were shouting, "Order! Order!" But always intrepid, besides being fortified by "three coffees" he'd had before coming in, the wine salesman kept on defending himself, right in the middle of the crowd.

"What? Me, an aristocrat? Come on now!"

Finally allowed to explain, he declared that we would never have peace as long as there were priests around, and since they'd all just been talking about economic policies, a good one would be to shut all the churches, confiscate all the precious vessels, and then do away with all religious sects.

Someone objected that this might be going too far.

"Yes! It's going very far! But when a ship is caught in a storm . . ."

Without waiting for the conclusion of the analogy, another spoke up: "Fine, but we can't destroy the whole building all at once, like a clumsy stonemason . . ."

"That's an insult to masons!" howled a citizen covered in plaster; and insisting on believing he'd been offended, he proceeded to hurl insults, tried to start a fight, hanging on to his bench tightly. It took the full strength of three men to get him thrown out.

Meanwhile, the workingman was still on the podium. The two secretaries told him to get down. He protested at the injustice of it. "But you'll never keep me from declaring: Eternal love to our dear France! Eternal love too to the Republic!"

Then Compain said, "Citizens! Citizens!"

Repeating that "Citizens!" eventually led to something like silence, and now holding the podium with his two red hands, like a couple of tree stumps, he leaned forward, and, closing his eyes:

"I believe we need to extend the scope of the calf's head."

Everyone was silent, thinking they must have misheard him.

"Yes! The calf's head!"[24]

At that, three hundred people burst into laughter. The ceiling shook with it. Seeing all those faces overwhelmed with joy, Compain drew back. He continued, in a furious tone of voice, "What? You've never heard of the calf's head?"

Now they were laughing so hard they were nearly delirious. People held their sides. A few even fell down and rolled on the ground, under the benches. Compain couldn't tolerate it any longer; he took refuge next to Regimbart and tried to get him to leave with him.

"Oh no! I'm staying to the end!"

His reply decided Frédéric; as he looked around right and left for his friends to give him support, he caught sight of Pellerin standing at the podium. The artist took a disdainful tone with the group.

"I would just like to know, where is the candidate for Art in all this? I happen to have made a painting . . ."

"We don't need any paintings!" came a brutal shout from a thin man with red spots on his cheekbones.

Pellerin exclaimed that he was being interrupted.

But the other said, in a tragic tone of voice, "Shouldn't the government have issued decrees by now abolishing prostitution and poverty?"

That having won him the favor of the audience, he went on to inveigh against the corruption in big cities.

"Shame! Infamy! We ought to go grab hold of those bourgeois when they come out of the Maison d'Or and spit in their faces! And if at least the government didn't actually encourage these vices! But the people who work for the revenue office are always up to some indecency with our wives and our sisters . . ."

A voice called out: "What a load of nonsense!"

"Throw him out!"

"They tax us to death to pay for their debauchery! Look how much an actor gets paid, for example . . ."

"Are you talking about me?" thundered Delmar.

He bounded up to the podium, pushing everybody else out of his way, and assumed his usual pose; declaring first that he despised all such accusations, he went on to expand on the civilizing influence actors have. Since the theater was the gateway for national education, he voted for theatrical reform; to begin with, no more managers, and no more privileges!

"Yes! No privileges of any kind at all!"

The actor's spiel had got the audience warmed up, and now one subversive proposal was shouted down by another.

"No more academies! Down with the Institut!"

"No more missions!"

"No more baccalaureate!"

"Down with university degrees!"

"No—let's keep them," said Sénécal, "but they should be conferred by universal suffrage, by the People, the only true judge!"

That really wasn't the most useful thing to be discussing anyway. The first thing to be done was to bring the rich down a peg or two! He described them as gorging on their criminal pleasures beneath gilded ceilings while the poor, writhing with hunger in their hovels, cultivated all the virtues. The applause now reached such a crescendo that he had to stop for a moment. He stood there, his eyelids closed and his head thrown back, as if he were rocking himself gently on the wave of outrage that he had instigated.

Then he started talking again, this time more dogmatically, using phrases that sounded as imperious as laws. The State must take over the banks and the insurance companies. Inheritance must be

abolished. A fund specifically for workers must be set up. Many other good measures would be needed in the future. These few, for the moment, would suffice; then, returning to the subject of elections: "We need citizens who are pure, men who are entirely new! Does anyone want to come forward?"

Frédéric stood up. There was a little buzz of approbation, coming from his group of friends. But Sénécal, playing the role of a modern Fouquier-Tinville,[25] began interrogating him on his name, given names, antecedents, way of life, and morals.

Frédéric's answers were short and curt, and he bit his lips. Sénécal asked if anyone saw any impediment to his candidature.

"No! No!"

But he saw one. Everyone leaned forward and listened carefully. The individual had failed to pay a certain promised sum to found a democratic institution, a newspaper. Moreover, on February 22, even though he had been notified in plenty of time, he failed to show up at the Place du Panthéon.

"I swear that he was at the Tuileries!" cried Dussardier.

"Can you swear that he was at the Panthéon?"

Dussardier lowered his head; Frédéric said nothing; his friends, scandalized, looked at him uneasily.

"At least," Sénécal went on, "is there a patriot who can answer for his principles?"

"I can!" said Dussardier.

"Oh, that's not enough. Someone else!"

Frédéric turned toward Pellerin. The artist responded with a series of gestures that signified "Ah, my good friend, they've rejected me! Damn it! What can I do?"

Frédéric nudged Regimbart with his elbow.

"Ah, yes! That's right! It's time! I'm on my way!"

And Regimbart went up onto the platform; then, nodding toward the Spaniard who had followed him: "Permit me, citizens, to introduce to you a patriot from Barcelona!"

The patriot made a deep bow, rolled his silvery eyes like an automaton, put his hand on his heart, and said: "*¡Ciudadanos! Mucho aprecio el honor que me dispensáis, y si grande es vuestra bondad mayor es vuestra atención.*"[26]

"Stop! I have the floor!" Frédéric exclaimed.

"*Desde que se proclamó la constitutión de Cádiz, ese pacto fundamental de las libertades españolas, hasta la última revolución, nuestra patria cuenta numerosos y heróicos mártires.*"[27]

Frédéric tried again to make himself heard: "Citizens, please!"

The Spaniard continued, "*El martes próximo tendrá lugar en la iglesia de la Magdalena un servicio fúnebre.*"[28]

"But this is completely absurd! Nobody can understand him!"

This offended the crowd.

"Throw him out! Throw him out!"

"Who? Me?" asked Frédéric.

"Yes, you!" said Sénécal, majestically.

"Get out!"

He got up to leave; the voice of the Spaniard pursued him all the way.

"*Y todos los españoles desearían ver alli reunidas las deputaciones de los clubs y de la milicia nacional. Una oración fúnebre en honor de la Libertad Española y del mundo entero será pronunciada por un miembro del clero de Paris en la sala Bonne-Nouvelle. Honor al pueblo francés, que llamaría yo el primero pueblo del mundo, si no fuese ciudadano de otra nación!*"[29]

"Aristocrat!" some fool called out, shaking his fist at Frédéric, who hurried into the courtyard in high indignation.

He reproached himself for his revolutionary devotion, without considering that in fact the accusations against him were just. What an absurd idea, this candidacy! But what a collection of asses, what cretins! He compared himself with those people, and he soothed the wound to his pride by reflecting on their stupidity.

Then he felt the need to see Rosanette. After all that ugliness, all that bombast, her gentle sweetness would be a relief. She knew that he was planning to declare his candidacy at a club that evening. But when he came in, she didn't so much as ask him a question about it.

She was sitting close by the fire, picking the lining out of a dress. Seeing her doing such a thing surprised him.

"For heaven's sake! What are you doing?"

"It's obvious enough," she said brusquely. "I'm patching up my old clothes. All for your Republic."

"Why my Republic?"

"What—you think I should call it mine?"

And she started blaming him for everything that had happened in France over the past two months, accusing him of having started

the revolution, and of causing the ruin of so many people that all the wealthy men were abandoning Paris, and no doubt she would eventually die in the workhouse. "You can go on talking, with that income of yours! And anyway, the way things are going, you won't have that income very much longer."

"That may be true," said Frédéric. "The most devoted people are always the most misunderstood; and if you didn't have a conscience, these brutes you have to deal with would make you disgusted with your self-sacrifice!"

Rosanette stared at him, her eyes narrowing. "What? What self-sacrifice? So monsieur didn't succeed, I take it? Well, that's all the better! It'll teach you to go in for patriotic generosity. Oh, don't try to lie! I know you've given them three hundred francs, because that's what that mistress of yours, the Republic, demands! Well, have yourself a wonderful time with her, my boy!"

Beneath this torrent of absurdities, Frédéric passed from one disappointment into another, even deeper one.

He moved to the back of the room. She came over to him.

"Look, let's just think about it for a minute! A country is just like a house, it has to have a master; otherwise, everybody would have their hands in the basket. And everybody knows that Ledru-Rollin is up to his neck in debts! And then Lamartine—well, how do you expect a poet to understand politics? Sure, you can shake your head and keep thinking you're smarter than everybody else—still, it's true! But you're always quibbling; a person can't get a word in with you! Look, for example, at Fournier-Fontaine, with those Saint-Roch shops of his! Do you know how much he's out? Eight hundred thousand francs! And Gomer, the delivery man across the street, another republican: he broke the tongs over his wife's head, and he's drinking so much absinthe they're going to put him in the madhouse. That's what they're all like, republicans! A Republic, on sale, seventy-five percent off! That's the truth! Go ahead, be proud of it!"

Frédéric got up and left. The stupidity of the woman, parading itself like that in vulgar language, disgusted him. He even felt his patriotic fervor coming back.

Rosanette's bad mood could only deepen. Mademoiselle Vatnaz irritated her with her enthusiasm. Believing she was on a mission, she was infected with the urge to orate, to catechize, and since she was better at that kind of thing than Rosanette, she won all the arguments.

One day she came in seething with indignation over Hussonnet, who had just been making indecent jokes at the Women's Club.[30] Rosanette approved of his attitude, declaring that she would even put on men's clothes and go "tell them what's what, and then whip them." Just then, Frédéric came in. "And you'll come with me, won't you?"

Despite his being there, the two went on squabbling, the one taking the bourgeois point of view, the other the philosopher's. Women, according to Rosanette, were born specifically for love or for raising children and keeping house. According to Mademoiselle Vatnaz, women should take their place in the governing of the State. In other eras, the women of ancient Gaul made laws, as did Anglo-Saxon women; and the wives among the Hurons belonged to the tribal Council. Both sexes should be involved in the work of civilization. All people had to contribute, to substitute fraternity for egoism, associations for individualism, and collective farming for individual holdings.

"Oh, ho! Now you're an agriculture expert!"

"And why shouldn't I be? Anyway, it concerns humanity, and the future!"

"Go meddle with your own future!"

"It is my future!"

They were getting more heated. Frédéric intervened. Mademoiselle Vatnaz got so wound up that she started saying she supported Communism.

"Oh, how stupid!" said Rosanette. "Do you really think that could ever happen?"

The other cited, as proof, the Essenes, the Moravians, the Jesuits in Paraguay, the Pingon family near Thiers in Auvergne;[31] and she gestured so wildly that she got her watch chain tangled up with a little golden sheep hanging from her charm bracelet.

At that, Rosanette went extremely pale.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz continued trying to untangle her charm.

"No need to explain any further," said Rosanette. "Now I know what your political opinions are."

"What do you mean?" asked Vatnaz, blushing like a virgin.

"Oh, you know perfectly well what I mean!"

Frédéric didn't understand. Clearly, something had come up between them that was more important, and more personal, than socialism.

"Well, and what of it?" said Vatnaz, straightening up fearlessly. "It's a loan, my dear, debt for debt!"

"By God, I never deny my debts! And for a few thousand francs, what a lovely little story it makes! At least I borrow—I don't rob anybody."

Mademoiselle Vatnaz forced herself to laugh.

"I'd put my hand in the flame to prove it's true!"

"Be careful—it's dry enough that it might catch fire."

The old maid held up her right hand, just in front of the other's face: "But some friends of yours think my hand is just fine!"

"Andalusians, I suppose? They can use it instead of castanets."

"Slut!"

The Marshal made a deep bow.

"You really couldn't be more ravishing."

Mademoiselle Vatnaz said nothing. Little drops of sweat appeared on her temples. She kept her eyes fixed on the carpet; she was panting. Finally she made it to the door, and before slamming it behind her: "Good evening then! You'll be hearing from me."

"How delightful!" said Rosanette.

She had fought to keep herself calm, but now the effort exhausted her. She fell back onto the divan, trembling all over, stammering insults, and bursting into tears. Was the threat by Vatnaz worrying her? Not at all: she laughed at it! Well, could it be that the other owed her money? It was that golden sheep, a gift; and in the midst of her tears, she let slip the name of Delmar. So, she was in love with that phony!

"But if so, why did she take me on?" Frédéric asked himself. "How did he get back in the picture? What's forcing her to keep me? And what does it all mean, anyway?"

Rosanette continued to sob. She remained lying on her side, her right cheek on her hands—and she seemed so delicate, so oblivious, and so hurt that he bent down to her and kissed her gently on the forehead.

At that, she assured him of her feelings for him; the Prince had just left, and they were alone together. But she found herself, right now, somewhat . . . in financial straits. "You saw me the other day, when I was patching up my old clothes." No more carriages now! And that wasn't all: the upholsterers were threatening to repossess the furniture from her bedroom and the great drawing room. She didn't know what to do.

Frédéric felt an impulse to say: "Don't worry! I'll pay for everything!" But the lady just might be lying. He had learned from his experience. He confined himself to saying consoling things.

Rosanette's fears were quite real; she did have to return the furniture and move out of the apartment on the Rue Drouot. She found another, on the Boulevard Poissonière, on the fourth floor. The knickknacks from her old bedroom were enough to make the new three-room place seem stylish. She had Chinese blinds, an awning over the terrace, and, in the drawing room, a used carpet that was still quite new, and pink silk tuffets. Frédéric had been the primary contributor to these purchases; he felt the kind of pleasure a newlywed does when he finally owns his own place, his own wife with him; and finding himself feeling perfectly at home there, he soon was sleeping there most nights.

One morning, as he was coming out into the hall, he saw, down on the third floor, the shako of a National Guardsman coming up the stairs. Where was he headed? Frédéric waited. The man kept climbing the stairs, keeping his head bowed down a little. He raised his eyes. It was Monsieur Arnoux. The situation was clear. They both blushed at the same time, both feeling the same embarrassment.

Arnoux was the first to find a way out of it.

"She's better, isn't she?" he asked, as if, Rosanette having been ill, he had come to hear how she was doing.

Frédéric took advantage of the opening.

"Yes, definitely! At least, her maid told me so," trying to make it seem as if he hadn't been admitted.

Then they stood face to face, both uncertain, each eyeing the other. The question was which of them would be staying on. Arnoux, again, solved the problem.

"Ah well! I'll come over some other time! Where are you headed? I'll walk with you."

And when they were out in the street, he began chatting as naturally as ever. Clearly, he wasn't at all the jealous type, or maybe he was too easygoing to be upset. Besides, he was preoccupied with the state of the country. He wore the uniform all the time these days. On March 29 he had helped with the defense of the offices of *La Presse.*[32] When the Chambre des Députés was invaded, he had distinguished himself by his bravery, and he had been present at the banquet for the National Guard at Amiens.[33]

Hussonnet, always on duty with Arnoux, profited from the situation by making more use of his flask and smoking more cigars than anybody else; but having a strong irreverent streak, he thought it was amusing to contradict him; he made fun of the bad grammar in the decrees, of the lectures at the Luxembourg, the Vesuvians, the Tyroleans, practically everything, right down to the Chariot of Agriculture, which was hitched up to horses instead of oxen, and was led by ugly girls.[34] Arnoux, on the contrary, defended the current government, and hoped for the different parties to overcome their differences. But his business dealings had taken a turn for the worse. It didn't worry him too much.

Nor did this discovery of a relationship going on between Frédéric and Rosanette; it gave him permission both to cut off the payments he had been sending her since the Prince left and to keep a clear conscience about it. He pleaded his business difficulties, groaned mightily about it, and Rosanette responded generously. This made Monsieur Arnoux feel he was her true lover, her heart's choice—which boosted his self-esteem and made him feel young again. Feeling certain that Frédéric was keeping the Marshal, he found the whole thing a "fine joke," and even kept his visits secret, leaving Frédéric a clear field whenever they met.

This sharing of Rosanette wounded Frédéric; and his rival's civilities seemed to him like a comedy that had gone on too long. But if he were to get angry, he might ruin his chances of someday returning to Madame Arnoux; moreover, the husband's presence at least gave him the opportunity to hear about her. The faience manufacturer, as was his custom, or perhaps out of malice, frequently brought her up in conversation, and asked why he didn't come over to see her any more.

Frédéric ran through every excuse he could, and then said that he had come to see her a number of times but never found her at home. Arnoux believed this story, because he had often expressed his delight at home at their friend's absence, and she always responded by saying that she had been out and had missed his visit—and thus, two lies that might have contradicted each other instead ended up seeming to corroborate each other.

The gentleness of the younger man and the pleasure of making him his dupe gave Arnoux an even greater affection for him. He pushed the familiarity to extremes, not out of disdain for Frédéric but out of trust in him. One day he wrote to him that a pressing matter required him

to go to the provinces for a twenty-four hour period, and he begged Frédéric to substitute for him with the National Guard. Frédéric didn't dare refuse, so he showed up at the guard post at the Carrousel.

There he had to endure the company of the Guardsmen! Apart from a refiner, a witty man who drank prodigiously, they all struck him as having no more brains than their knapsacks did. Their most sparkling conversations were based on replacing their old equipment with new waistbelts. Others railed against the National Workshops.[35] A man would exclaim, "Where are we headed?" And his listener would reply by opening his eyes wide, as if he'd just realized he was standing on the edge of an abyss, and would echo, "Where are we headed?" Another, somewhat bolder one, would interject: "This can't go on! It has to end!" And this same discourse being repeated all day long, Frédéric was bored to death.

He was greatly surprised when, at eleven o'clock, he saw Arnoux appear, telling him that he'd concluded his business and had now rushed to the guardpost to relieve him.

There hadn't been any business. The whole thing was an invention to allow him to spend a whole twenty-four hours with Rosanette. But the sturdy Arnoux had overtaxed his strength, and once fatigue set in, he started feeling remorseful. He'd come to thank Frédéric and to invite him to supper.

"Thanks very much! But no, I'm not hungry. All I want is to go home and go to bed!"

"All the more reason we should dine together! Don't be a weakling! You can't go home now—it's too late! It'd be dangerous!"

So Frédéric gave in, once again. Nobody had expected to see Arnoux, so all his friends came around to flatter him, especially the refiner. They all loved him; he was such a good fellow that he even said he missed the absent Hussonnet. But right now he needed to close his eyes, just for a minute or two, no longer.

"Come on over here with me," he said to Frédéric as he stretched out on the cot, without removing his equipment. In case there was an alert, and despite the regulations, he kept his gun with him; then he muttered a few phrases—"my sweetheart! My little angel!"—and almost instantly fell asleep.

The people who had been talking now fell silent, and bit by bit, a great silence fell on the guardpost. Frédéric, tormented by fleas, sat and looked around him. The wall had been painted yellow, and

halfway up it there extended a shelf, knapsacks looking like little humps along it, while lead-colored rifles were stacked beneath it; snores began rising from the National Guardsmen, their bellies forming vague shapes in the darkness. Upon the stove stood an empty bottle and some plates. Three straw-bottomed chairs stood around the table, where a deck of cards remained spread out. A drum stood on the middle of a bench, its strap hanging down. A warm wind coming in from the door made the oil lamp smoke. Arnoux slept on with his arms open; his rifle was leaned against him at an angle, its butt on the floor, its muzzle in his armpit. Frédéric noticed it, and felt a certain fear.

"But no! There's nothing to fear! Yet, if he were to die . . ."

And suddenly a whole series of images began to race through his mind. He saw himself with Her at night, in a post-chaise; then beside a river bank on a summer evening; and then in the lamplight, in their own home, where they lived together. He even imagined their domestic details, living arrangements, contemplating their happiness, feeling his heart throbbing with happiness—and to make it all come true, all that needed to happen was to pull the rifle's trigger! He could push it with his toe; the shot would go off, and it would have been an accident, nothing more!

Frédéric dwelled on the idea like a dramatist working out his plot. Suddenly he thought that it was going to be done, that he would be the one doing it, that he wanted to do it; and then he was seized with a great fear. But amid that anguish he felt a certain pleasure, and he let himself sink deeper and deeper into it, feeling all his scruples weakening and dissipating; in this furious fantasy, the rest of the world began to be erased; and he even lost all sense of himself apart from an intolerable tightness in his chest.

"Want a little white wine?" asked the refiner, who had got up.

Arnoux leaped up onto the floor; and having taken some white wine, he insisted on taking over the rest of Frédéric's shift.

Then he took Frédéric to dine at Parly's on the Rue de Chartres; and since he needed to build his strength back up, he ordered two different meat dishes, lobster, a rum omelet, a salad, etc., all of it washed down with Sauternes from 1819 and a Romanée from '42, not to mention the dessert Champagne, and of course the liqueurs.

Frédéric cooperated with all his wishes. He was uneasy, as if the other might be able to read, on his face, the truth about what he'd been thinking.

Both elbows on the table, bent forward, Arnoux fixed his gaze on him intensely and proceeded to confide in him about his latest schemes.

He had been thinking about trying to lease the embankments all along the northern railway in order to plant potatoes there, or about organizing an enormous parade that would feature all the "current celebrities." He would rent out all the windows along the route, which, at three francs each, more or less, would produce a tidy profit. Basically, he was dreaming about coming up with some kind of big idea that would let him corner a market. He was, though, a man of morals, uninterested in any excess or misconduct, spoke about his "poor father," and every evening, he said, made an examination of conscience before offering his soul up to God.

"A little curaçao, eh?"

"If you like."

As far as the Republic was concerned, things would work out well enough; in any case, he considered himself the luckiest man on earth; then, forgetting himself, he launched into praises of Rosanette, even comparing her to his wife. Two very different cases! You've never seen more beautiful thighs.

"Your health!"

Frédéric clinked glasses with him. Trying to be polite, he had ended up drinking a bit too much; moreover, the bright sunlight was dazzling him; and when they went back up the Rue Vivienne together, their epaulettes touched each other's, like two brothers.

When he finally got back home, Frédéric slept until seven. Then he went to the Marshal's. She was gone—she'd left with someone. Could it be Arnoux? Not knowing what to do, he continued walking along the boulevard, but had to stop when he got to the Rue Saint-Martin because of the crowd there.

Poverty had made a considerable number of unemployed workers idle; every evening they came here, strolling around as if on military parade and awaiting some signal. Despite the law forbidding such assemblies,[36] these "despair clubs" were growing, and in an alarming manner; quite a few bourgeois came down to look, either out of bravado or because it was the fashionable thing to do.

Suddenly Frédéric saw, just a few feet away, Monsieur Dambreuse and Martinon; he turned aside; because it had been Dambreuse who

ended up being elected to the Chambre, he held a grudge against him. But the capitalist came up to him.

"A word, please, my dear monsieur! I owe you an explanation."

"I'm not asking you for one."

"But please! Do hear me out."

It was not his fault at all. People had begged him, almost forced him to run for the position. Martinon jumped in to affirm what he said; a deputation of people from Nogent had come to him.

"And you see, I believed I was free to act when . . ."

The crowd surged suddenly, pushing Monsieur Dambreuse aside. A minute later he was back, saying to Martinon, "You did me a good turn there! You won't regret it."

All three leaned up against a shop front, in order to talk more easily.

Shouts rose up from time to time: "Long live Napoléon! Long live Barbès! Down with Marie!"[37] The enormous crowd was getting louder—and all those voices, echoing off the housefronts, made a continual sound, like waves in a port. At certain moments they would stop altogether; then someone would start singing the "Marseillaise." Under archways, mysterious figures were offering sword-canes for sale.[38] Sometimes you would see two people wink as they passed each other, and then hurry quickly away. Groups of gawkers stood on the sidewalks; the dense crowd packed the street. Whole bands of policemen would emerge from the side streets, and then as quickly disappear. Little red flags stood up here and there, looking like flames; the cab drivers up on their seats waved their arms and then turned away. All this movement made for a fascinating spectacle.

"Imagine how all this," Martinon said, "would have amused Mademoiselle Cécile!"

"My wife, and you know this perfectly well, doesn't like my niece to accompany us," said Dambreuse with a smile.

You wouldn't have recognized the man. For the last three months he had been crying, "Long live the Republic!" He had even voted for banishing the Orléans family. But no more concessions now! He was so fierce about this that he took to carrying a blackjack in his pocket.

Martinon had one, too. Now that judges no longer held lifetime appointments, he had resigned from the Prosecutor's Office, and now he was even more violent in his opinions than Dambreuse.

The banker especially hated Lamartine (for his having supported Ledru-Rollin), as well as Pierre Leroux, Proudhon, Considérant, Lammenais, and all those socialist hotheads. "Because, after all, what do they want? The tax on meat is gone, and so is imprisonment for debt; today they're looking at a project for a mortgage bank, while just the other day it was supposed to be a national bank! And the budget calls for five million for workers! But fortunately that's all over, thanks to Monsieur de Falloux![39] Well, goodbye to all that! Good riddance, too!"

In fact, unable to figure out a way to feed the 130,000 men in the National Workshops, the Minister of Public Works had, that very day, signed a decree that called on all men over the age of eighteen to enlist in the army, or, alternatively, be sent to the provinces to work on farms.

The alternative was met with indignation, as many thought it part of a plan to do away with the Republic. Having to live far away from the capital felt, to many young men, like going into exile; they imagined themselves dying of fevers and laboring in uncivilized lands. Moreover, for the many who were used to much more delicate work, agriculture seemed like a degradation; in short, the whole business was a trap, a ploy, an insult, the formal negation of all the promises that had been made. If they resisted, force would be used; they believed that easily enough, and they set about getting ready for it.

About nine o'clock, the great crowds near the Bastille and the Châtelet began flowing back out onto the boulevards. From the Porte Saint-Denis to the Porte Saint-Martin there was nothing but a gigantic, swarming mass of people, a solid mass of dark blue, that somber color that now looked almost black.[40] All the men one saw had intense, burning eyes, pale complexions, and bodies that were both thinned by hunger and exalted by the sense of injustice. But as they walked, huge clouds moved in; the stormy sky above electrified the crowd, and it surged backward and forward, swelling and receding, uncertain which way to head, and you could sense in its depths the presence of an incalculable power, beating with an elemental energy. Then all the crowd began to cry out: "Light your lights! Light them!" Many windows remained darkened, and stones were hurled at them. Monsieur Dambreuse thought it would be prudent to get away. The two young men escorted him home.

He foresaw great disasters. The people once again would invade the Chambre; and he told the story of how he would have been killed back on May 15 if it hadn't been for a National Guardsman.

"Oh, but I forgot: it was your friend, the faience man, Jacques Arnoux!" The mob had him nearly suffocated when that fine citizen had picked him up in his arms and carried him to safety. So a kind of connection had been established between the two. "One of these days, we should all have a dinner together, and since you often see him, do tell him again how much I appreciate him. He's an excellent man, one who's been slandered, if you ask me; and how brave he was that morning! Well, my compliments again! I hope you have a good evening. . . ."

Frédéric, after leaving Monsieur Dambreuse, went back to the Marshal's apartment; and he said to her, in a somber tone of voice, that she would have to choose between him and Arnoux. She replied sweetly that she couldn't understand "such nonsense," that she didn't love Arnoux, and that she wasn't attached to him in any way whatsoever. Frédéric felt a strong urge to get out of Paris. The idea was attractive to her too, and they left for Fontainebleau the next morning.

The inn where they stayed stood out from the others by having a fountain splashing in the middle of the courtyard. The doors of the rooms opened onto a corridor, as they do in monasteries. The one they rented was large, with fine furniture and chintz hangings; it was quiet, for there were few travelers. Outside in front of the houses, locals with not much to do strolled by; when evening came, children played prisoner's base on the street below their window—and such tranquility, after all the tumult of Paris, was both surprising and soothing.

Early in the morning, they went to tour the chateau. As they came in the main gate, spread out before them was the entire façade, with its five towers, all with pointed roofs, and the horseshoe-shaped staircase at the back of the courtyard, flanked on both sides by lower buildings. Moss on the paving stones, seen from a distance, blended with the fawn-colored bricks; and the whole palace, rust colored, like an old suit of armor, had something about it that suggested royal serenity and a somewhat sad military grandeur.

Eventually a servant with a set of keys appeared. He escorted them up into the apartments of queens, the oratory of the Pope, the gallery of François I, the little table upon which the emperor had signed his

abdication, and in one of the rooms that had been made from dividing up the old hunting gallery, the place where Christina had had Monaldeschi murdered.[41] Rosanette listened attentively to all this history, and then turned to Frédéric.

"Did she do it out of jealousy? Better watch yourself!"

They walked through the Council Chamber, the guards' hall, the throne room, and the salon of Louis XIII. The high windows, without curtains, let in a white light; a film of dust coated the sheen on the window catches and the brass feet on the tables; sheets of coarse linen covered the armchairs everywhere; over the doorways they could see hunting scenes from the days of Louis XV, and here and there were tapestries depicting the Olympian gods, Psyche, or the battles of Alexander the Great.

Every time she passed a mirror, Rosanette stopped for a moment to smooth her hair.

After the keep tower and the Saint-Saturnin chapel, they came to the banqueting hall. They were enchanted with the splendor of the ceiling, divided into octagonal compartments that were trimmed with gold and silver, jewel-like in their fine detail, and by the abundance of paintings that covered the walls, all the way from the enormous fireplace—itself decorated with crescents and quivers surrounding the arms of France—to the musicians' platform on the other end of the huge room. The ten arched windows were wide open; the sun coming in made the paintings shine, while the blue sky seemed to be an extension of the ultramarine seen on the arches; and from deep in the forest, where the treetops looked like mist against the horizon, an echo seemed to come of the old ivory hunting horns and the mythological ballets that, in those days, brought princesses and lords together in the costumes of nymphs and shepherds—that era when science was not yet mature, that era of violent passions and sumptuous art, when the goal was to whisk the world away to the Hesperides, and to set the mistresses of kings in competition with the constellations. The most beautiful of those mistresses was depicted in a painting to their right, in the guise of Diana the Huntress, even of Diana of the Underworld, no doubt as a sign of the power she would continue to wield beyond the grave. All these symbols worked together to confirm her glory; and indeed something of her still remained there, a vague sense of a voice, a lingering ray of light.

Frédéric felt an inexplicable upsurge of lust, a nostalgic lust. To distract himself from it, he turned and gazed tenderly at Rosanette, asking her if she would have liked to have been that woman.

"Which woman?"

"Diane de Poitiers." He added, "Diane de Poitiers, the mistress of Henri II."

She uttered a little "ah!" Nothing more.

Her silence confirmed that she knew nothing of all this, understood nothing, and it was so obvious that he asked her kindly, "Are you bored, a little?"

"Oh no, no, not at all!"

And standing tall with her chin raised, gazing all around her somewhat vacantly, Rosanette tried a witticism. "All this brings back memories!"

Still, he could see an expression on her face suggesting that she was trying to be respectful; and since that serious air made her even prettier, Frédéric forgave her.

The carp pond amused them both. For a quarter of an hour, she tossed little bits of bread into the water, watching the fish dash up for them.

Frédéric had seated himself beside her, beneath the lime trees. He thought about all the famous people who had frequented these same walls—Charles V, the Valois, Henri IV, Peter the Great, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and "the lovely weeping women in the stage boxes,"[42] Voltaire, Pius VII, Louis-Philippe; he felt surrounded, almost crowded, by that tumultuous group of the dead; so many images were racing through his mind that he felt dizzied, though he also found the experience enchanting.

Eventually they got up and walked down to the parterre.

This flower garden was a vast rectangle, allowing the eye to take in, with a single glance, its broad yellow pathways, its grassy squares, its ribbons of boxwood, its pyramid-shaped yews, its shorter shrubs, and its narrow flowerbeds, where the blooms stood out brightly against the grayish earth. At the far end of the garden was a park, across which flowed a long canal.

Royal residences have a particular sort of melancholy about them, arising no doubt from the fact that they are so very large yet they house so very few people; from their silence, which is such a surprise, as

one expects to hear trumpets blowing fanfares; and from their never-modernized luxury, which testifies vividly to how fleeting dynasties are, and to the ephemerality of everything around us—and the way they seem to exhale the past, a scent as overwhelming and funereal as that of a mummy, will be felt even by the least educated mind. Rosanette couldn't stop yawning. They turned and went back to the hotel.

After their lunch, they hired an open carriage. They left Fontainebleau by a broad crossroads, then followed a sandy path uphill into a forest of small pines. The trees began getting bigger; and the driver would, from time to time, name some of the sites: "This is the Siamese Twins, the Pharamond, the King's Bouquet . . ." and not missing a single one, sometimes even stopping so they could admire the scene.

They entered the Franchard forest. The car glided over the grass like a sledge; pigeons were cooing, though they couldn't be seen; then, suddenly, a café waiter appeared; and they got down outside the gate of a garden with many round tables. Then, the ruins of an abbey on their left, they walked over large rocks, soon coming to the bottom of the gorge.

It was covered, on one side, by heaps of sandstone rocks and juniper, while on the other, the almost bare earth sloped down to the hollow of a valley where a path traced a pale-tinted line through the heather; and they could see, in the distance, a cone-shaped hill with a flat top, and a telegraph tower behind it.

A half hour later, they got out of the carriage again to climb the heights of Aspremont.

The path zigzagged through dwarf pines, beneath rocks with jagged edges; this whole corner of the forest seemed somehow muffled, wild, and secret. It made one think of hermits, companions to the great stags of bygone eras with fiery crosses between their horns, who would have welcomed, with paternal smiles, the fine old kings of France when they came to kneel before their caves. The smell of resin permeated the warm air; tree roots interlaced on the ground, looking like live veins. Rosanette tripped over one, fell into despair, and wanted to cry.

But up on the summit, upon seeing there, canopied with branches, a kind of tavern, where they sold woodcarvings, she felt happy again. She drank a bottle of lemonade, bought a stick of holly, and without so

much as glancing at the view of the landscape below, went right into the Brigands' Cave, preceded by a boy carrying a torch.

Their carriage awaited them in the Bas-Bréau.

A painter wearing a blue smock was working beneath an oak tree, his box of paints open on his knees. He raised his head and watched them pass.

Midway up the Chailly slope, a sudden cloudburst made them put up the carriage top. Then, just as suddenly, the rain stopped; and the paving stones on the streets were gleaming in the sun when they came into the town.

Some newly arrived travelers told them that a bloody battle was underway in Paris.[43] Rosanette and her lover were not surprised. Soon the new people moved on, and the hotel became peaceful again; the gaslight was turned off, and they fell asleep to the murmur of the fountain in the courtyard.

The next day they went to see the Wolf's Gorge, the Fairy Pool, the Long Rock, the Marlotte; the day after that, they set out again, this time not even asking where they were going, but letting the driver decide, and missing out, as a result, on some of the more famous spots.

They found themselves so comfortable in their old landau, low-slung like a sofa and upholstered in striped linen! Ditches thick with undergrowth slid past in a gentle, continuous motion. Rays of white sunlight shot through the tall ferns like arrows; sometimes the straight line of a little-traveled road opened up before them, with weedy growths sprouting here and there in a kind of languor. A signpost stood up in the center of every crossroads, extending its four arms outward; farther on, stakes drooped like dead trees, and little paths would twist their way into the distance, becoming lost to sight among the thick foliage, making them wish they could follow them; then the horse would turn, and the carriage would enter the wood, sinking into the mud; farther on, moss was growing along the edges of the deep ruts.

They thought they were all alone, far away from anyone else, but then suddenly a gamekeeper would go past, carrying his gun, or a group of women in rags, toting on their backs the firewood they'd gathered. When the carriage came to a stop, there was a universal silence; the only thing to be heard was the horse, breathing between the shafts, or the call of a distant bird, faint and repeated.

The sunshine illuminated the edges of the woods, leaving the depths darkened in shadow; or, the foreground dimmed in a kind of twilight, it would create a purple mist off in the middle distance, and even farther off, a nearly white brightness. At noontime the sun shone directly down onto the expanses of verdure, splashing them with light, hanging silvery drops on the tips of the branches, streaking the grass with trails of emeralds, and scattering little golden spots onto the beds of dead leaves; looking up, you caught a glimpse of sky between the tops of the tall trees. Some of them, amazingly tall, had the air of a patriarch or an emperor, and some, their branches touching each other's, looked like triumphal arches, anchored up by their long trunks, while others, growing aslant from the ground, looked like columns about to fall.

Sometimes this crowd of thick vertical ranks would open out. Then, huge waves of green would roll away in great, uneven ridges down into the valleys, where other hills stood over yellow plains that were eventually lost in a vague, pale color.

Standing next to each other on some rise in the land, they breathed in the wind and felt it enter their souls, like the pride of a freer life, and felt their strength growing, feeling a joy that seemed to have no cause.

The diversity of trees made for a constantly changing spectacle. The beeches, their bark white and smooth, interwove their crowns; the ashes, with their sea-green branches, formed gentle curves; in the hornbeam coppices, holly bushes bristled, looking like bronze; then came a line of thin birches, bending in elegiac poses; and the pines, symmetrical as a set of organ pipes, constantly swaying in the wind, seemed to be singing. There were oaks too, rugged and enormous, seeming to rise convulsively up from the earth; they embraced one another, and with their solid, torso-like trunks, reached their bare arms outward in mute despair and furious threat, like a group of Titans immobilized in their fury. A heavy, feverish languor seemed to hover over the ponds, bordered by thornbushes; the lichens on their banks, where wolves stood as they drank, was sulphur-colored, as though burned by witches' footprints, and the continuous croaking of the frogs echoed that of the crows wheeling overhead. Then they walked across monotonous clearings, planted here and there with saplings. The high, harsh sound of iron sounded in the distance, repeated hammering blows: up on a hillside, a company of quarrymen

were breaking rocks. As they walked farther, the rocks multiplied, eventually filling up the whole landscape, great cubes like houses, flat ones like paving stones, propping each other up, hanging over one another, and merging together like the unrecognizable, monstrous ruins of some long-dead city. But the fury of this chaos made one think of volcanoes, deluges, huge, unknown cataclysms. Frédéric said that they had been there since the beginning of time, and would remain until the end; Rosanette looked away, saying, "That kind of thing will drive me mad," and she went off to pick some heather, whose little violet flowers, heaped up on top of each other, formed irregular patches, and the crumbling soil beneath made a sort of black fringe over the mica-spangled sand.

They found themselves, one day, halfway up a hillside made entirely of sand. Its surface, unmarked by any footprints, was lined with symmetrical undulations; here and there rose up, like promontories in a dried-up ocean, rocks with vaguely animal-like shapes—tortoises pushing their heads out, seals crawling along, hippopotami and bears. No other people. No sound. The sand, lit up by the sun, dazzled their eyes; then, suddenly, in the shimmering light, the animals all seemed to move. They turned back immediately, feeling dizzy and a little afraid.

The forest solemnity began to affect them; and they passed hours of silence when, allowing themselves to be rocked by the landau's springs, they remained in a state of calm intoxication. His arm around her waist, he listened to her talk while the birds chattered, observing—as if they were all parts of a single image—the black grapes on her hat, the berries on the junipers, the folds of her veil and the arching clouds above; and when he bent down to her, the scent of her skin mingled with that of the forest. They enjoyed everything, pointing out the strangeness of the spider's webs suspended from the bushes, of holes filled with water in the midst of a rocky area, a squirrel up in the branches, the flight of a pair of butterflies following them; or, at times, twenty feet away, beneath the branches the doe walking along in perfect tranquility with a noble, gentle air about her, keeping her fawn close by her side. Rosanette wanted to rush after them to hug them.

She got quite a fright once when a man, suddenly appearing right in front of them, showed her three vipers in a box. She hurled herself

immediately into Frédéric's arms—he felt happy that she was weak, and that he was strong enough to protect her.

That evening, they dined in an inn on the banks of the Seine. The table was next to the window, and Rosanette sat across from him; he contemplated her delicate little white nose, her pouting lips, her clear eyes, her loose, chestnut-colored hair, her pretty oval face. Her ecru silk dress accented her slightly sloping shoulders; and her two hands, emerging from her plain cuffs, cut her food, poured her drink, moved here and there across the tablecloth. They were served a spread of chicken, a stew of eels in a pipe-clay serving dish, some rough, bitter wine, some too-hard bread, with jagged knives. Everything worked together to enhance the pleasure, the illusion. They imagined they were on a journey to Italy, on their honeymoon.

Before going back, they took a long walk along the riverbank.

The sky was a gentle blue, and rounded like a dome, it reached all the way down to the horizon, ending at the serrated line of trees. Straight ahead, across a meadow, they could see the steeple of a village; farther away and to their left, the roof of a house formed a red spot over the river, which, from here, seemed motionless all along its sinuous length. But reeds were bending, and the water gently shook the sticks planted in the bank to hold the nets; a wicker eel-trap stood there, along with two or three old rowboats. Over by the inn, a girl in a straw hat was drawing buckets from a well—and every time she got the bucket drawn up, Frédéric listened to the grinding of the chain with an inexpressible pleasure.

He had no doubt that he was going to be happy now for the rest of his life, for his happiness seemed utterly natural, inherent in his life and in the person of this woman. He felt an urge to whisper endearments to her. She replied with gentle words, a little tap on the shoulder, little acts of sweetness that surprised and charmed him. He thought he was discovering an entirely new beauty in her, though perhaps it was only the reflection of their surroundings, unless somehow their secret inner essence had allowed it to rise to the surface.

When they stretched out and rested in the middle of the countryside, he would lay his head on her knees, in the shade of her umbrella—or sometimes they would lie in the grass face to face, looking deep within each other's eyes, which looked different now, slaking their thirst for each other, and then, their eyelids closing, they would fall silent.

Sometimes they would hear, off in the distance, drumrolls. It was the call to arms being beaten in the villages, urging people to come to the defense of Paris.

"Oh, of course—the riots!" Frédéric would say, a disdainful pity in his voice, all that distant agitation seemingly a small, poor thing compared to their love and eternal Nature.

And they went on to talk about any subject that occurred to them—saying things they both already knew perfectly well, discussing people who didn't interest them in the slightest, a thousand kinds of foolishness. She talked to him about her maid and about her hairdresser. One day, she let her real age slip: she was twenty-nine, and growing old.

She told him, several times, more about herself than she had meant to. She had been a "shop girl," had traveled to England, had begun studying acting; all of these bits of information came out without transitions, so he had trouble piecing it all together into a whole. She told him even more about herself one day when they sat below a sycamore tree on the edge of a meadow. Down below, by the side of the road, a barefoot little girl was grazing a cow. As soon as she saw them, she came over to beg for money; with one hand holding her ragged skirt, she scratched her head through her thick black hair, which looked like a wig from the days of Louis XIV, framing her brown face, which was lit up by her splendid eyes.

"She's going to be awfully pretty in a few years," said Frédéric.

"But what chance has she got, if she doesn't have a mother!" replied Rosanette.

"What? What do you mean?"

"Oh yes—I was thinking of me, if I hadn't had mine . . ."

She sighed, and then began talking about her own childhood. Her parents had been silk workers at La Croix-Rousse.[44] She had worked with her father as a sort of apprentice. The poor man worked constantly, only to listen to his wife curse him and see her spend everything they had on drink. Rosanette could see it all again now, the looms up next to the windows, the stockpot on the stove, the bed painted to look like mahogany, the armoire across from it, and the little dark closet where she slept until she was fifteen. But then a gentleman showed up one day, a fat man in black, with skin the color of boxwood and a pious air about him. He engaged her mother in conversation, and they made a deal so that three days later . . .

Rosanette stopped, turning to look at him with an impudent, bitter expression.

"That was all there was to it!"

Then, responding to Frédéric's gesture: "Since he was married—he didn't want anyone in his house to find out—I was brought to a private room in a restaurant; I was told I was going to be happy, and that I'd be getting a nice present.

"As soon as the door was opened, the first thing I saw was a silver candelabra on a table set for two. You could see it reflected in a mirror on the ceiling, and the walls, hung in blue silk, made the whole room look like a secret alcove. I was surprised. You have to understand, a poor little thing who'd never seen any of the world before! But even though I was so impressed, I was also scared. I wanted to get out of there. But I stayed.

"The only place to sit was on a divan close to the table. It gave, softly, when I sat down; the heating vent in the carpet blew hot air on me, and I sat there without touching a thing. A waiter stood there, encouraging me to eat. He poured me a big glass of wine; my head was spinning, I wanted to open the window, but he said, 'No, mademoiselle, that's not allowed.' Then he went away. The table was heaped with things I'd never seen before. None of it looked good to me. Eventually I picked up a jar of preserves, and then continued to wait. I don't know what delayed him. It was very late, midnight at least, and I was dead tired; I pushed away one of the pillows so I could lie down, and I found a kind of album there; it was a set of obscene pictures. . . . I was sleeping on it when he finally came in."

She lowered her head and grew pensive.

The leaves around them were rustling, and over in a nearby clump of weeds, a big foxglove swayed, light pouring over the grass like a wave; the silence was broken by the sound of the cow grazing, though they could no longer see it.

Rosanette sat with her gaze fixed on a point about three feet away, her nostrils quivering, absorbed in her thoughts. Frédéric took her hand.

"How you must have suffered, my poor dear!"

"Oh yes, more than you could ever know! . . . To the point of wanting to put an end to it all. They fished me out of the river."

"What?"

"Oh, let's not think about it! . . . I love you, and I'm happy! Kiss me." She plucked off, one by one, the tiny bits of thistle that had clung to the hem of her dress.

Frédéric was thinking of what she hadn't told him. What were the stages by which she brought herself up out of poverty? To which lover did she owe her education? What had happened in her life up to the night he came to meet her for the first time? Her last statement didn't invite any further questioning. But he did ask her how she came to meet Arnoux.

"Through Vatnaz."

"Didn't I see the two of you with him once at the Palais-Royal?"

He gave her the exact date. Rosanette made an effort.

"Yes, I think that's right . . . I wasn't quite as cheery in those days!"

But Arnoux had treated her well. Frédéric didn't doubt it; still, their friend was an odd sort, with more than his share of faults; he took care to remind her of them. She agreed.

"But what's the difference! I love him anyway, the old swine!"

"You still do? Even now?"

She blushed, half laughing and half irritated.

"No, no! That's ancient history. I'm not hiding anything from you. And even so, it's a different kind of thing! Anyway, I don't think you're being very nice to your victim."

"My victim?"

Rosanette held him by the chin.

"Exactly!"

Then, lapsing into a nursemaid's way of talking to a child, "We haven't always been so wise, have we! We did the naughty with his wife!"

"Me! Of course not—never!"

Rosanette smiled. The smile wounded him; he thought it proof of her indifference. But she switched to a gentler tone, and asked, with one of those facial expressions that seem to beg for a lie, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure!"

Frédéric swore on his word of honor that he had never thought about Madame Arnoux that way, because he was too much in love with somebody else.

"And who would that be?"

"You, of course, my beauty!"

"Oh, don't play games with me like that! You make me angry!"

He thought it prudent to invent some love affair, some passion from the past. He came up with good, specific details. This woman had, however, made him deeply unhappy.

"You really don't have any luck, do you?"

"Oh, well, I wouldn't put it like that!" he said, trying to suggest that there had been many conquests in order to make her think more highly of him—just as Rosanette had reduced the number of her lovers, so that he would think more highly of her. So it is, that even amid the most intimate confidences, there are always things holding us back, whether false shame, tactfulness, or pity. We suddenly find ourselves facing, either within ourselves or in the other, the edges of abysses or morasses that bring our progress to a halt; and then we tell ourselves that we wouldn't really be understood; it's very difficult to manage to express anything at all with any precision, and so it is that perfect, complete union between two people is a rare thing.

The poor Marshal had never known anything better. Often, when she was gazing at Frédéric, tears came to her eyes; then she would raise her eyes and look off toward the horizon, as if she had seen some beautiful dawn, with grand vistas of unbounded happiness. One day she admitted that she wished they could have a Mass said for them, "because it would bring good luck to our love."

But then why had she resisted him for so long? She herself didn't know why. He brought the question up several more times, and she replied while holding him tightly in her arms. "It's because I was afraid of loving you too much, my darling!"

Sunday morning, Frédéric was reading a newspaper when he came upon a list of wounded and saw the name of Dussardier. He cried out, and showing the paper to Rosanette, said that he had to leave immediately.

"To do what?"

"To see him, to take care of him!"

"You're surely not going to leave me alone here?"

"Come with me."

"And get myself mixed up in trouble like that? No, thank you!"

"Still, you see, I can't . . ."

"Oh, you can't, you can't! Do you really believe the hospitals don't have nurses? Anyway, why is it any of your business? Every man for himself!"

Such egoism made him indignant; and he reproached himself for not having stayed down there with the others. So much indifference to the misery his country was going through—there was something low, something bourgeois about it. Now his love suddenly felt like a crime. They both pouted for an hour.

Then she begged him to wait, not to expose himself to danger.

"What if you were to get killed!"

"Well, in that case I'd only have done my duty!"

Rosanette leaped up. In the first place, his duty was to love her. Or maybe he was sick of her—that must be it! There was no common sense in this! What an idea, good God!

Frédéric rang for the bill. But it wasn't easy to get back to Paris. The Leloir mail coach had just left, the Lecomte berlins[45] weren't running, the Bourbonnais diligence wouldn't come through until late at night, and it might very well be full—there was no way to tell. After losing precious time acquiring all these facts, the idea of riding post occurred to him. The master of the post refused to let him have one of his horses, because Frédéric didn't have a passport. Finally, he rented a small carriage—in fact the one they had used on their outings—and they arrived in front of the Hôtel de Commerce in Melun at about five.

Rifles were standing in stacks everywhere on the market square. The prefect had forbidden the National Guard from entering Paris. Those who weren't from his département wanted to go on anyway. Everyone was shouting. Inside the inn was pandemonium.

Rosanette was terrified, declaring she would not go one foot farther, begging him again to stay there with her. The innkeeper and his wife urged him to do so as well. A friendly man dining there spoke up, saying that, anyway, the fighting was almost over; but, still, a fellow had to do his duty. At that the Marshal burst into tears all over again. Frédéric was exasperated. He gave her his wallet, kissed her quickly, and left.

When he got to the Corbeil station, he heard that the insurgents had cut the rails in several places, and the driver refused to go any farther; his horses were "beat."

With his help, however, Frédéric was able to get hold of a broken-down cabriolet with a driver who, for sixty francs, not counting tip, consented to take him as far as the Porte d'Italie. But the driver abruptly stopped about a hundred paces from the gate, made Frédéric get out, and turned back. Frédéric was walking down the road when

a sentry pointed his bayonet at him. Four men took hold of him, exclaiming, "This is one of them! Be careful! Search him! Thief! Low-life!"

He was so utterly stunned that he allowed himself to be hauled over to the guardhouse at the gate, situated right at the crossing of the Boulevards des Gobelins and de l'Hôpital with the Rues Godefroy and Mouffetard.

All four streets were blocked by barricades made of huge paving stones; here and there, torches sputtered; despite the clouds of dust, he could make out some infantry and some National Guardsmen, their faces blackened, looking bedraggled and haggard. They had just taken control of the square and shot several men dead; their rage was not yet satisfied. Frédéric said that he'd come from Fontainebleau to help a wounded comrade who lived on the Rue Bellefond; no one believed him at first; they examined his hands, even sniffed at his ears to be sure he didn't smell of gunpowder.

But by dint of repeating it over and over, he managed to convince a captain, who ordered two riflemen to escort him to the guardhouse at the Jardin des Plantes.

They set off down the Boulevard de l'Hôpital. A strong wind was blowing, and he felt revived by it.

Then they turned down the Rue Marché-aux-Chevaux. The Jardin des Plantes, on the right, was a great black mass; to the left, the entire façade of the Pitié looked as if it were on fire, with every single window lit up and shadows moving rapidly back and forth behind them.[46]

The two men escorting Frédéric left. Another man came to take him as far as the École Polytechnique.

The Rue Saint-Victor was totally dark, without so much as a single lamp burning, or even a light in any of the houses. Every ten minutes or so he could hear:

"Sentries! Attention!" And that cry, bursting out into the deep silence, continued to echo afterward, like the echoes of a stone falling into a profound abyss.

Sometimes he would hear heavy footsteps tramping toward him: it would be a patrol of at least a hundred men; from that shadowy mass whispers could be heard, and metallic, clinking sounds; swaying along rhythmically, they would soon be lost in the darkness.

A dragoon on horseback stood motionless in the middle of the crossroads. Now and then a courier would come galloping past, and

then the silence would return. Artillery moving along the pavement made a low, disturbing rumble; one's heart tightened at these sounds, so different from the sounds of ordinary life. They seemed, somehow, to magnify the silence, the deep, absolute silence—a black silence. Men in white coats would come up to the soldiers, say a word or two to them, and then vanish like phantoms.

The guardhouse at the École Polytechnique was packed with people. Women crowded the entryway, asking to see their son or husband. They were sent to the Panthéon, which had been turned into a morgue—and no one paid any attention to Frédéric. But he insisted, swearing that his friend Dussardier was waiting for him, and was at death's door. Finally they assigned a corporal to escort him down the Rue Saint-Jacques, to the town hall of the Twelfth Arrondissement.

The square in front of the Panthéon was filled with soldiers lying on straw. Dawn was breaking. The campfires were being put out.

The insurrection had left frightening traces in that neighborhood. The surface of the streets, from one end to the other, was pitted and broken up. The barricades were in ruins, and leaning up against them were omnibuses, gas pipes, and wagon wheels; little black puddles here and there were clearly blood. The houses had been riddled with bullets, and holes blown in the plaster let you see the underlying timbers. Window blinds, held up by a single nail, waved in the wind like rags. Staircases had collapsed, and doors opened onto a void. You could see the interiors of bedrooms, their wallpaper in shreds; at times a delicate object appeared to have escaped unscathed. Frédéric noticed a clock, a perch for a parrot, some prints.

When he went into the town hall, National Guardsmen were endlessly gossiping about the deaths of Bréa and Négrier, the député Charbonnel, and the archbishop of Paris.[47] Rumors were flying: the Duc d'Aumale had landed at Boulogne,[48] Barbès had escaped from Vincennes, artillery was on its way from Boulogne, help was flooding in from the provinces. Around three o'clock some good news came in: spokesmen for the insurgents were in talks with the president of the Assemblée.

This made everyone rejoice; and since he still had twelve francs, Frédéric ordered twelve bottles of wine to be brought in, hoping this would help get him released. Suddenly they all thought they could hear firing. The drinking stopped; they all looked at the newcomer with suspicious eyes; for all they knew, this one could be Henri V.[49]

To avoid responsibility, they had him taken to the town hall in the Eleventh Arrondissement, where they kept him until nine in the morning.

At that point he left, running all the way to the Quai Voltaire. At an open window, an old man in his shirtsleeves sat weeping, staring up at the sky. The Seine flowed peacefully on its way. The sky was a perfect blue; in the trees of the Tuileries, birds were singing.

Frédéric crossed the Place du Carrousel, stopping when a funeral bier passed. The guard immediately presented arms, and the officer, bringing his hand up to his shako in a salute, said: "Honor to our fallen hero!" The phrase had become practically obligatory; in speaking it, one had to assume a solemn, deeply moved expression. A group of angry men walked alongside the bier, crying out, "We will avenge you! We will avenge you!"

Carriages were circulating on the boulevard, and in the doorways women sat shredding linen for bandages. But the insurrection had been put down, or almost; Cavaignac was having posters put up announcing it.[50] A troop of the new Mobile Guards appeared, coming down the Rue Vivienne. The bourgeois cheered them enthusiastically; they raised their hats, applauded, danced, tried to kiss them, offered them drinks—and flowers, thrown by women on the balconies, tumbled down upon them.

Finally, at ten o'clock, just as the cannon began firing for the assault on the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, Frédéric arrived at Dussardier's. He found him up in his attic room, stretched out on the bed asleep. A woman stepped quietly out from the room next to it—Mademoiselle Vatnaz.

She drew Frédéric aside and told him how Dussardier had come to be wounded.

The previous Saturday, up on the top of a barricade on the Rue Lafayette, a street child draped in the tricolor flag had shouted at the National Guardsmen: "Will you fire on your brothers?" As they advanced, Dussardier threw his rifle aside, ran off from the others, and jumped up onto the barricade, where he kicked the boy aside and grabbed his flag. They found him later under the debris, his thigh pierced by a copper shell. They had to cut open the wound to extract the projectile. Madamoiselle Vatnaz had come over that same night, and had stayed with him ever since.

She had prepared his bandages skillfully, helped him drink, seen to his every wish even before he said anything, and had come and gone as quietly as a mouse, gazing at him always with tenderness in her eyes.

For two weeks, Frédéric never failed to come over every morning; once he mentioned how devoted Vatnaz had been. Dussardier shrugged. "Oh, it's self-interest!"

"You think so?"

He nodded: "I'm sure of it!" without any further explanation.

She overwhelmed him with her thoughtful attentions, to the point of bringing him copies of the newspapers that reported on his heroic act. All this seemed to embarrass him. He even confessed to Frédéric that his conscience was bothering him.

Maybe he should have gone over to the other side, joined up with the men in the smocks; after all, they had been promised a great many things that never came to pass. Their conquerors detested the Republic; besides, they'd been treated so harshly! Of course, they were wrong, but maybe not completely; and the good young man was tormented by the idea that he might have fought on the side of injustice.

Sénécal, imprisoned in the Tuileries beneath the riverside terrace, was undergoing no such internal conflicts.

Nine hundred men had been hurled down there as in a heap, left there in the filth, black with powder and with clotted blood, shivering with fever, screaming with rage; when one of them died, no one came to remove the body. Sometimes, when they heard a sudden explosion in the distance, they feared they were all about to be shot, and they would rush up and throw themselves against the walls, and then fall back again, so stupefied by misery that they felt they were living in a nightmare, in some deathly hallucination. The lamp hanging from the high ceiling looked like a bloodstain; little flames, green and yellow, flickered here and there, produced by vaporous emanations from the cellars. Fear of an epidemic led to the creation of a committee. But after taking just the first few steps down into the cellars, the committee chairman turned back, repulsed by the stench of excrement and corpses. When the prisoners came up close to the grating, the National Guardsmen who had been posted there—to keep the prisoners from loosening the bars—would plunge their bayonets at random into the mass of men.

The Guardsmen were, generally speaking, merciless. Those who had not been in the actual fighting now wanted to stand out; it was as if all their fears had come flooding out. They took their revenge now on the newspapers, the clubs, the public gatherings, the doctrines, on everything that had made them so angry over the last three months; and despite their victory, equality (as if to punish its defenders and mock its enemies) manifested itself vigorously: an equality of brute animals, everyone on the same level performing the same kind of bloody violent acts; because the fanaticism of the wealthy counterbalanced the fury of the poor, the aristocracy was just as maddened as the mob, and those in cotton caps were no less vicious than those in the red ones. The public reason was utterly deranged, as if some enormous cataclysm in nature itself had taken place. Once-clever men went insane for the rest of their lives.

Old man Roque had become very brave, almost foolhardy. He had come up on the twenty-sixth with the Nogent contingent, but instead of going back when they did, he had joined the National Guard camped at the Tuileries; and he was delighted to be put on sentry duty by the riverside terrace. There, at least, he finally had the swine under him, where they belonged! He took great pleasure in their defeat, their abjection, and he couldn't keep himself from cursing at them.

One of them, a teenager with long blond hair, put his face between the bars and asked for some bread. Monsieur Roque ordered him to be quiet. But the young man repeated, in a sorrowful voice, "Bread, please!"

"Do you think I've got any bread?"

Other prisoners came up to the grate, their beards bristling and their eyes ablaze, all of them pushing each other and howling, "Bread!"

Old Roque was indignant at seeing his authority disrespected. To frighten them, he picked up his rifle and aimed it at them; the young man, meanwhile, was lifted up toward the ceiling by the jostling crowd; throwing his head back, he cried out once more: "Bread!"

"All right! There you go!" said old Roque, firing his rifle.

There was an enormous howling—and then, silence. On the edge of the grating, something white was hanging.

After that, Monsieur Roque went back to his place, for he had, on the Rue Saint-Martin, a small house, and he'd kept a room in it for

himself, as a pied-à-terre; the damage done to the building's façade by the rioting had contributed not a little to his foul mood. But now, looking at it again, he thought perhaps he had exaggerated the damage. His recent act had calmed him down, as if he had been paid some compensation.

His daughter herself opened the door. The first thing she said was how worried she'd been at his long absence; she was afraid something had happened to him, that perhaps he'd been wounded.

This little proof of daughterly love softened old Roque even more. He was surprised to see that she had come to town without Catherine.

"I sent her off on an errand," said Louise.

She asked about his health, about this and that; then, in a seemingly indifferent tone, she asked if he had happened to run across Frédéric.

"No—haven't seen any sign of him!"

It was for him that she'd made the trip.

Someone could be heard walking in the corridor.

"Ah! Excuse me . . ."

And with that she disappeared.

Catherine had been unable to find Frédéric. He'd been away for several days now, and his close friend Monsieur Deslauriers was living in the provinces now.

Louise came back to her father, trembling visibly, unable to speak.

She leaned against a chair to support herself. Her father cried out, "What's wrong?"

She made a sign implying that it was nothing, and with a great effort of will she managed to calm herself down.

The caterer across the street brought some soup. But old Roque had undergone a too-violent emotional experience. "It won't go down," he said, and at dessert he had a kind of faint. They sent immediately for a doctor, who prescribed a potion for him. Then, when he was in his bed, Monsieur Roque asked for as many blankets as possible, to make him sweat. He sighed and moaned a little.

"Thank you, dear Catherine!—Louise, kiss your poor father, my little sweetheart! Oh, these revolutions!"

And when his daughter reproved him for worrying too much about her and making himself ill, he replied, "Yes, you're right! But I can't help it! I'm just too sensitive!"

II

Madame Dambreuse sat in her boudoir between her niece and Miss John, listening to Monsieur Roque, who was going on about his military woes.

She bit her lips and seemed to be in pain.

"Oh, it's nothing! It'll pass!"

And then, in a gracious tone of voice, "We're having one of your acquaintances here for dinner—a Monsieur Moreau."

Louise shuddered.

"Also a few close friends of ours—Alfred de Cisy, among others."

She went on to praise his manners, his looks, and above all his morality.

Madame Dambreuse was being more truthful than she knew; the vicomte was indeed contemplating marriage. He had spoken about it to Martinon, adding that he was confident Mademoiselle Cécile would find him attractive, and that his family would accept her.

Risking a confidence like that could only mean that he had managed to get some good news about her probable dowry. Now, Martinon suspected that Cécile was the natural daughter of Monsieur Dambreuse; and he would have been strongly inclined himself to try to win her no matter what. But such audacity posed some dangers as well; and so, Martinon had, up to now, behaved carefully, never compromising himself; and he didn't know how to get rid of the aunt. Hearing this from Cisy decided him; and he had made his proposal to the banker, who saw no objection to the idea, and who had just told Madame Dambreuse about it.

Cisy came in. She got up, saying, "Ah, I was beginning to think you'd forgotten us. Cécile, shake hands."[51]

At exactly that moment, Frédéric appeared.

"Ah, finally we see you again!" cried old Roque. "I've stopped by your place three different times this week, with Louise too!"

Frédéric had taken great pains to avoid them. He claimed that he was spending all his time with a wounded friend. And on top of that, he'd been terribly busy with all sorts of things; he desperately tried to think of a plausible story. Fortunately, the other guests arrived: first was Monsieur Paul de Grémonville, the diplomat he'd seen at the ball; then came Fumichon, the industrialist whose conservative views had

so shocked him one evening; and then came the elderly Duchesse de Montreuil-Nantua.

But then were heard, out in the entryway, two raised voices.

"I'm sure of it!" said one.

"My dear lady! My dear lady!" replied the other; "Calm down!"

The latter was Monsieur de Nonancourt, an aging dandy half-mummified in cold cream, and the other was Madame de Larsillois, the wife of one of Louis-Philippe's prefects. She was trembling with fear, for she had just heard an organ grinder on the street playing a polka that was a signal to the insurgents. Many bourgeois at that time had similar imaginary fears; some actually believed men were massing in the catacombs, ready to blow up the Faubourg Saint-Germain; people heard strange sounds coming from their cellars; suspicious things were glimpsed behind closed windows.

Everyone did their best to calm Madame de Larsillois down. Order had been reestablished. Nothing more to fear. "Cavaignac has saved us!" As if the real horrors of the insurrection hadn't been bad enough, they exaggerated them. Twenty-three thousand convicts had fought on the side of the socialists—twenty-three thousand, not one less! There was no doubt about the stories of poisoned food, of Mobile Guardsmen being sawn in half between two planks, and of flags with coded signs on them calling for pillage and arson.

"And there's more!" said the ex-prefect's wife.

"Ah, my dear, please!" said Madame Dambreuse out of a sense of propriety, glancing meaningfully in the direction of the three girls.

Monsieur Dambreuse emerged from his study with Martinon. She turned her head and responded to the bow of Pellerin, who was walking toward her. The artist gazed around at the walls, seeming to be uneasy. The banker took him aside, explaining that, for the moment, he would have to conceal his revolutionary canvas.

"Of course!" said Pellerin, his political opinions having been modified by his failure with the Club de l'Intelligence.

Monsieur Dambreuse went on to say, smoothly, that he would be commissioning other works from him.

"Oh—but excuse me. . . . Ah, my friend, how good to see you!"

Arnoux and Madame Arnoux were suddenly standing in front of Frédéric.

He felt suddenly dizzy. Rosanette had irritated him all afternoon, going on and on about how much she admired the soldiers; and now his old love sprang back to life.

The head butler announced that dinner was served. Madame Dambreuse, with a significant glance, ordered the vicomte to take Cécile's arm, and she quietly said to Martinon: "You beast!" And with that, they all went into the dining room.

Beneath a pineapple's green leaves, in the middle of the table, lay a dolphin, its head pointed toward a haunch of venison and its tail toward an array of crayfish. There were figs, enormous cherries, pears, and grapes (all early fruits from Parisian hothouses), all piled in pyramids, in baskets of Dresden china; bunches of flowers were set up at intervals along the table, interspersed with the shining silverware; the blinds of white silk over the windows filled the room with a soft light; two fountains with ice in them cooled the place; and tall servants in knee breeches served the guests. All this seemed even better after the tumult of recent days. They were all able to enjoy, once again, all the things they feared they might be about to lose; and Nonancourt spoke for them all when he said, "Well, let's hope that our brother republicans will permit us to eat!"

"Despite that fraternity of theirs!" added the witty Roque.

Those two honorable gentlemen sat, one on the right and one on the left of Madame Dambreuse, directly across from her husband, who was seated between Madame de Larsillois (who had the diplomat next to her) and the elderly duchess, who had Fumichon elbowing her other side. Then came the painter, the faience merchant, and Mademoiselle Louise; and thanks to Martinon, who had switched places to get closer to Cécile, Frédéric found himself next to Madame Arnoux.

She was wearing a black barège dress, a gold bracelet on her wrist, and, just like on the first day he'd met her, something red in her hair—tonight, a little spray of fuchsia tucked into her chignon. He couldn't help saying to her, "It's been so long since we've seen each other!"

"Ah," she replied, coldly.

He continued, in a gentle voice that to some extent softened the impertinence of what he was saying, "Do you think about me sometimes?"

"Why would I think about you?"

This wounded Frédéric.

"Maybe you're right, after all."

But immediately repenting, he swore to her that not one day had passed without him being tortured by her memory.

"I don't believe a word of that, monsieur."

"Still, you know that I love you!"

Madame Arnoux said nothing.

"You know that I love you."

She remained silent.

All right—to hell with you then, thought Frédéric.

Raising his eyes, he looked around and saw, at the far end of the table, Mademoiselle Roque.

She had thought it would be stylish to dress entirely in green, but the color clashed violently with the tint of her red hair. Her waist buckle was too high, and her collar fit her badly; this lack of elegance no doubt contributed to the coolness in the way Frédéric had greeted her. She observed him at a distance with curiosity; Arnoux, next to her, wasted his time with all his gallantries, as he couldn't get three words out of her—it was so dire that he gave up and listened to the conversation instead. It concerned the banana pudding one got nowadays at the Luxembourg.

Louis Blanc, Fumichon said, owned a house on the Rue Saint-Dominique and refused to rent it to workingmen.

"What I find amusing," said Nonancourt, "is the idea of Ledru-Rollin hunting on the royal estates!"

"He owes twenty thousand francs to a goldsmith!" Cisy chimed in. "And besides that, they say . . ."

Madame Dambreuse stopped him. "Ah, it's a wretched thing to get worked up over politics! A young man too—shame on you! You should pay attention to the young lady beside you."

Then the more serious people began attacking the newspapers.

Arnoux spoke up in their defense; Frédéric got involved too, saying that after all they were commercial enterprises like any other. Their writers were typically imbeciles or liars; he claimed he was quite familiar with them, and he replied to his friend Arnoux's more generous comments with sarcasm. Madame Arnoux assumed this was a kind of vengeance upon her.

Meanwhile, the vicomte was torturing his intellect in an effort to conquer Mademoiselle Cécile. He began by displaying his aesthetic

sensibility, criticizing the shape of the carafes and the chasing pattern on the knives. From there, he turned to his stable, his tailor, and his shirtmaker; from there he moved to the weighty topic of religion, making sure that his lovely neighbor knew that he scrupulously performed every obligation.

Martinon did rather better. In a monotone voice, never taking his eyes off her, he praised her delicate, birdlike profile, her dull blonde hair, her too-small hands. The ugly girl settled happily into this warm bath of eulogy.

No one could hear much, as everyone was talking too loudly. Monsieur Roque wanted to see France governed by "an iron fist." Nonancourt said it was a shame that people couldn't be executed anymore for political crimes. They'd have plenty to kill with this batch of dogs!

"They're all cowards," said Fumichon. "I mean, how much bravery does it take to hide behind a barricade?"

"Speaking of that, tell us about Dussardier!" said Monsieur Dambreuse, turning to Frédéric.

The brave clerk was a hero now, like Salesse, the Jeanson brothers, the Péquillet woman, and others.[52]

Frédéric didn't wait for anyone to press him on the topic but instead launched into his friend's story; thus he was able to share a bit of Dussardier's halo.

This led naturally to a discussion of different kinds of courage. According to the diplomat, it was not so difficult to face death—witness those who've fought in a duel.

"The vicomte can tell us all about that," said Martinon.

The vicomte turned bright red.

They all looked at each other; Louise, even more in the dark than the others, asked quietly, "What's that about?"

"He got cold feet in a duel with Frédéric," Arnoux whispered to her.

Nonancourt immediately asked her, "Do you know the story, mademoiselle?" He passed it on to Madame Dambreuse, who bent forward a little to look at Frédéric.

Martinon didn't wait for Cécile to ask questions. He told her that the affair concerned a certain unspeakable individual. The girl shrank back in her chair, as if trying to avoid contact with a libertine.

Soon the conversation had started up again. Excellent Bordeaux wines were circulating—people grew animated—and Pellerin said he

couldn't forgive the revolution for the damage it did to the Spanish museum, which was completely destroyed. That was what bothered him, as a painter, the most. Hearing that word, Monsieur Roque turned to him.

"Aren't you the one who painted that remarkable picture?"

"I might be! Which picture?"

"The one that shows a woman in a . . . well, I must say . . . somewhat revealing costume, holding a purse, and with a peacock behind her."

Now it was Frédéric's turn to blush. Pellerin acted as if he hadn't heard.

"But no, it has to be you! Because it has your name along the bottom, and there's a line on the frame saying the picture belongs to Monsieur Moreau."

One day, while old Roque and his daughter were waiting at his place, they had seen the portrait of the Marshal. The innocent old man even said he thought it must be a "Gothic picture."

"No, not at all!" exclaimed the painter angrily. "It's the portrait of a woman."

Martinon added, "Yes, and it's a woman who's very much alive, isn't it, Cisy?"

"No, I don't know anything about it."

"I thought you knew her. But if it's awkward for you to talk about it, I apologize!"

Cisy lowered his gaze, his embarrassment proving beyond a doubt that he had played some disreputable role related to this portrait. As for Frédéric, the model clearly had to be his mistress. That point occurred to several of them at the same moment, and the expressions on their faces showed it.

How he lied to me! thought Madame Arnoux.

So that's the woman he left me for! thought Louise.

Frédéric was thinking that these two stories could damage his reputation; and when they were out in the garden, he reproached Martinon for bringing them up.

Mademoiselle Cécile's suitor burst out laughing right in his face.

"Are you kidding me? This will do you nothing but good! Wait and see!"

What did he mean by that? And why was he being so kind all of a sudden, acting so out of character? Unable to make sense of it, Frédéric

went over to the end of the garden where the women were sitting. The men were all standing, and Pellerin, in their midst, was going on at length about his various ideas. Monarchy, no doubt about it, was the system most favorable to the arts. The modern world disgusted him, "because of the National Guard if nothing else," and he yearned for a return to the Middle Ages, or to Louis XIV; Monsieur Roque congratulated him on his opinions, adding that they were helping overturn all his previous prejudices about artists. But soon he drifted away, attracted by what Fumichon was saying. Arnoux was trying to explain that there were two socialisms, one good and one bad. The industrialist didn't see the difference between them, because the very word "property" sent him into a rage.

"The right to property is the most natural thing in the world! People all over the world see it my way. Look—children cling to their toys, and look at the animals too—even the lion, if he could speak, would declare himself a landowner! Now take me, gentlemen: I started with fifteen thousand francs in capital! Over the last thirty years I've got out of bed at four every single day! I had to fight off five hundred devils to make my fortune! And now somebody comes along and says my money doesn't really belong to me, and, in short, that property is theft!"

"But Proudhon . . ."

"Don't talk to me about your Proudhon! If he were here, I swear I'd strangle him!"[53]

And he would have strangled him. Especially after the liqueurs had been served, Fumichon was a different man; and his apoplectic face looked like a bomb about to explode.

"Hello, Arnoux," said Hussonnet, who came walking rapidly over the lawn.

He was bringing Monsieur Dambreuse the first pages of a new pamphlet titled *The Hydra;* the bohemian was writing now for a circle of reactionaries, and the banker introduced him as such to the other guests.

Hussonnet went on to amuse them, first by saying that the candlemakers were paying 392 street children to call out "lights on!" every evening, then by mocking the principles of '89, the freeing of the slaves, the orators of the left; he went so far as to tell a story about "Prudhomme on the Barricade," perhaps out of a naïve jealousy of

these affluent people who had just dined so well.[54] The joke didn't go over well. The faces grew longer.

Anyway, this was no time for pleasantries, said Nonancourt, mentioning again the deaths of Monseigneur Affre and of Général Bréa. These two were brought up again and again; people used them as arguments. Monsieur Roque declared that the archbishop's death "was really just as sublime as possible"; Fumichon gave the palm to the military man; and instead of simply deploring the two murders, they debated which of them caused them the most indignation. Another parallel came up, this one between Lamorcière and Cavaignac.[55] Monsieur Dambreuse thought Cavaignac was the greater hero, Nonancourt Lamorcière. No one there, except Arnoux, had seen either man at work. But they nonetheless formulated firm, irrevocable opinions about each man's operations. Frédéric held back from taking a side, confessing that he hadn't participated in the fighting. The diplomat and Monsieur Dambreuse both nodded their approval to him. Because after all, to do battle against the insurgents was to defend the Republic. Even though the result was a good one, it only strengthened the Republic; now that they had rid themselves of the vanquished, it was time to think about doing away with the vanquishers.

They had only just come out into the garden when Madame Dambreuse took Cisy aside and criticized him for his clumsiness; when she saw Martinon, she dismissed Cisy and asked her future nephew why he had chosen to ridicule the vicomte.

"No reason."

"And all that for the greater glory of Monsieur Moreau! What was your goal in that?"

"No particular goal. Frédéric is a charming young man. I like him a great deal."

"Well, I do too! Have him come over. Go find him!"

After two or three banalities, she began to offer gentle criticisms of her guests, implying that he was better than they. He didn't fail to denigrate the other women, a nice roundabout method of complimenting her. But she had to leave him from time to time; it was her evening for receiving guests, and ladies were arriving; then she would return to him, and the chance arrangement of the chairs ensured that they were not overheard.

She was by turns cheerful, serious, melancholic, and thoughtful. The current preoccupations didn't interest her much; there was a whole realm of things that were more lasting and meaningful. She complained about the way the poets distorted the truth, and then, looking up at the sky, she asked the name of a particular star.

Two or three Chinese lanterns had been hung in the trees; they rocked in the wind, and their multicolored rays seemed to tremble on her white gown. Madame Dambreuse was in her usual pose, leaning back in her armchair, a footstool in front of her; the tip of a black satin slipper peeked out; and she now and then made a remark in a louder voice, or even gave a little laugh.

These coquetries had no effect on Martinon, focused as he was on Cécile; but they did make an impression on the little Roque, who was chatting with Madame Arnoux. The latter was the only woman who didn't seem haughty. She had come over to sit with her; then, giving in to the need to speak of what she was thinking about, "He speaks well, doesn't he, Monsieur Frédéric Moreau?"

"Do you know him?"

"Oh yes, very well! We're neighbors. He played with me when I was little."

Madame Arnoux gave her a long look that seemed to say, "You're in love with him, aren't you?"

The expression on the younger woman's face seemed to say, quite directly, "Yes, I am!"

"Do you see him often?"

"Oh, no! Only when he comes to visit his mother. He hasn't been there for about ten months now! He had promised to come more often."

"Well, you mustn't put too much faith in men's promises, my young friend."

"But he never deceived me!"

"Well, he's deceived others!"

Louise shuddered: Is it possible he's made promises to her too? Her expression changed to one of mistrust and even hatred.

It made Madame Arnoux feel almost afraid; she wished she could take back what she'd said. The two of them sat silently.

Frédéric was sitting on a folding chair directly across from them, so the two of them continued looking at him, one of them with

discretion, out of the corner of her eye, and the other quite openly, her mouth hanging open, being so obvious that Madame Dambreuse said to him, "Do turn around so she can see you better!"

"Who?"

"The daughter of Monsieur Roque!"

She went on to joke with him about the lovesick little provincial. He denied it, trying to laugh.

"I don't believe it! I ask you! An ugly duckling like that!"

But at the same time his vanity was enormously pleased. He remembered that other evening, when he had left, his heart sunk under the weight of humiliation; and now he felt he could breathe freely; he felt he was finally in the kind of environment he belonged in, almost as if this house were actually his, as if he owned the Dambreuse mansion. The ladies sat in a half-circle in order to listen to him; thinking it would make him shine, he declared himself in favor of reestablishing divorce, which ought to be as easy and simple as getting up and leaving, so that people could come together or part whenever they wished.[56] They all were shocked at that; some of them whispered to each other; partial phrases could be heard there in the darkness by the ivy-covered wall. It sounded like the cheerful clucking of a group of hens; so he went on, developing and expanding upon his theme, with the confidence that comes from knowing one is a success. A servant appeared in the garden, bearing a tray full of ices. The gentlemen came over. They were talking about the arrests.

Frédéric avenged himself on the vicomte by suggesting that he might be vulnerable to arrest as a legitimist. The other objected that he hadn't so much as budged out of his room; his adversary kept enumerating all the bad things that might happen to him; both Monsieur Dambreuse and Monsieur de Grémonville found this amusing. They then complimented Frédéric, though they regretted that he hadn't used his talents in the defense of order, and their handshake was friendly; he could, from now on, count on them. Finally, when everyone began leaving, the vicomte made a low bow to Cécile:

"Mademoiselle, I have the honor of wishing you a good night."

She replied, rather drily, "Good evening!" But she gave Martinon a smile.

Old Roque wanted to continue his discussion with Arnoux, so he suggested accompanying him "and madame," since they were headed

in the same direction. Louise and Frédéric walked ahead of them. She had taken his arm; and when they had put a little distance between themselves and the others: "Oh, at last, at last! I was so miserable in there tonight! Those women are so unpleasant! They give themselves such airs!"

He tried to defend them.

"In the first place, you might have come over to talk to me when you came in; it's been a year since you've been home!"

"No, not a whole year," said Frédéric, happy to be able to focus on this detail and thus dodge all the others.

"Whatever, it's seemed like a long time to me, and that's the point! But during this abominable dinner you looked as if you were ashamed of me! Oh, I understand now: I don't have what it takes, what those other women all have."

"That's not true," said Frédéric.

"Tell the truth: Can you swear to me you're not in love with one of them?"

He did swear.

"And that I'm the only one you love?"

"Well, of course!"

That reassurance made her lively again. She wished they could get lost in the streets and spend the whole night walking together.

"I was so unhappy down there at home! All anybody talked about was barricades. I pictured you lying on your back, covered in blood! Your mother was in bed with her rheumatism. She didn't know anything. I had to keep quiet about it! I couldn't take it anymore! So I took Catherine with me and came here."

She went on to tell him all the details of her leaving, the roads she took, the lie she told her father.

"He's going to take me home in two days. Come over tomorrow night, as if you just happened by, and use the occasion to ask for my hand in marriage."

But Frédéric had never been further from marriage. Anyway, Mademoiselle Roque struck him as an absurd little person. What a difference between her and a woman like Madame Dambreuse! There was a better future awaiting him. He felt sure of it today; so this was definitely not the moment to get involved out of sentimentality, especially in a matter of such importance. He had to be clearsighted—and

he had just seen Madame Arnoux again. But all this frank talk from Louise was an embarrassment. He replied, "Have you really thought this step over?"

"What?" she cried, stunned and indignant.

He said that getting married at a time like this would be madness.

"Are you saying you don't want me?"

"You're not listening to me!"

He launched into a complicated speech, trying to make her understand that he had important things to deal with, serious, long-term business affairs to attend to, and that his inheritance itself was in danger (Louise cut him off there with a curt comment)—and finally, that political considerations meant any such step was unwise. So the best thing was to wait. Things would sort themselves out, no doubt; anyway, he hoped they would; and since he couldn't think of any reasons, he pretended suddenly to remember that he had been expected two hours ago at Dussardier's.

Having bowed to the others, he turned off down the Rue Hauteville, passed the Gymnase, came back out onto the boulevard, and quickly ran up the four flights to Rosanette's.

Monsieur and Madame Arnoux took their leave of Roque and his daughter at the corner of the Rue Saint-Denis. They walked on in silence—he because he had spent the whole evening chattering, and she because she felt an enormous weariness. This was the only man among all of them that evening who had shown any honest, decent feelings. She felt a great indulgence for him. But he still felt a certain resentment about Frédéric.

"Did you see his face when the subject of that portrait came up? And didn't I tell you he was her lover? You wouldn't believe me!"

"Oh, yes—I was wrong."

Arnoux, pleased with his victory, went on: "I'm willing to bet that when he left us just now, that's exactly where he went! He's at her place right this minute, count on it! He'll spend the night with her."

Madame Arnoux pulled her hood down low.

"Oh, but you're trembling!"

"I'm just a little cold," she said.

When her father was asleep, Louise went into Catherine's bedroom and shook her by the shoulder.

"Get up! Right away! And go find me a cab."

Catherine said that there weren't any at this hour.

"Well, then, are you going to take me there yourself?"

"Where?"

"To Frédéric's!"

"That's impossible. Why?"

To talk to him. She couldn't wait. She wanted to see him immediately.

"But think about it! To show up at his place in the middle of the night! And anyway, he'll be asleep!"

"I'll wake him up!"

"But this isn't something a young lady should do!"

"I'm not a young lady! I'm his wife! I love him! Come on, put your shawl on."

Catherine stood next to her bed, thinking. Finally she said, "No! I don't want to do it!"

"All right, then—stay here. But as for me, I'm going!"

Louise slipped down the stairs like a snake. Catherine rushed after her, catching up with her on the sidewalk. Everything she said was useless; she followed Louise, still buttoning up her jacket. She thought the walk seemed extremely long. She pleaded her aged legs.

"Besides, I don't have any motive for rushing along, like you do."

Then she grew sentimental.

"Poor little one! You've got nobody but your old Cathy, do you!"

She kept having misgivings from time to time.

"Oh, you're really up to something fine now! What if your father wakes up! My lord God! I only pray nothing terrible happens!"

In front of the Variétés theater, a National Guard patrol stopped them. Louise immediately told them that she and her maid were going to the Rue Rumford to fetch a doctor. They let them pass.

At the corner by the Madeleine, they encountered a second patrol; and when Louise gave the same explanation, one of the citizens said, "Is this one of those nine-months doctors, my little pussycat?"

"Gougibaud!" the captain exclaimed. "No smutty talk in the ranks! Mesdames, please go on."

Despite the reproach, the witty remarks continued.

"Give my respects to the doctor!"

"Look out for the big bad wolf!"

"They think they're so funny," Catherine said at the top of her voice. "They're like children!"

Finally they arrived at Frédéric's. Louise rang the bell vigorously, several times over. The door opened halfway; and the concierge replied to her question: "No!"

"But he must be in bed?"

"No, I tell you! He hasn't slept in his own place for three months now."

And with that, the little window on the lodge door came down like a guillotine. They stood there in the darkness, under the archway. A furious voice shouted at them: "Go away!"

The door opened once more; they left.

Louise had to sit down on a milestone; she wept, her head in her hands, abundantly, with all her heart. Day was breaking, and some wagons were driving by.

Catherine helped her up and supported her, kissing her and saying all sorts of gentle, soothing things, some drawn from her own experience. She shouldn't grieve like this over a lover. If this one is gone, she'll find plenty of others!

III

When Rosanette's enthusiasm for the Mobile Guards had calmed a bit, she became more charming than ever, and Frédéric, without giving it much thought, took to living in her place with her.

The best part of their day was the morning, which they spent on her terrace. Wearing a batiste gown, her bare feet in slippers, she came and went around him, cleaning her canaries' cage, changing her goldfish's water, and gardening with a small coal-shovel in the box filled with soil, from which her nasturtiums rose up onto a trellis on the wall. Then, leaning on the balcony, they would both watch carriages and passersby below while they made plans for the evening. They would separate for a couple of hours at most; then they would go to the one or another of the theaters; and Rosanette, a thick bouquet of flowers in her hand, would listen to the instruments while Frédéric whispered amusing things or little endearments in her ear. Other times they would take a coach out to the Bois de Boulogne; they would

stroll there till late, practically the middle of the night. Finally they would return via the Arc de Triomphe and the grand avenue, breathing in the night air, the stars up above them and the gaslights ahead of them all lined up like a double string of luminous pearls.

Frédéric waited for her whenever they were going out; it took her forever to get the two ribbons on her cap aligned just the right way on her chin; and she would smile at her reflection in the mirror of her armoire. Then she would put her arm in his and draw him over in front of the mirror to stand next to her.

"We look good together, the two of us side by side! Oh, my poor little lover, I could eat you up!"

He was her property now, her possession. It showed on her face, in a kind of continual radiance, and at the same time her movements became more langorous, her body more rounded; she had been changed somehow, though he could not quite say how.

One day she told him, as if it were quite important, a piece of news: Arnoux had set up a drapery shop for a woman who had worked in his faience factory; he went there every evening, and "he was spending a lot of money, and even more a week or so ago, when he bought her a whole collection of rosewood furniture."

"How do you know all that?"

"Oh, I know!"

Delphine had been ordered to find out what she could. So she must still love Arnoux if she's that interested in what he's doing! But Frédéric contented himself with saying, "What's it to you?"

The question surprised Rosanette.

"But the crook owes me money! Isn't it disgusting to see him spending it on sluts like that?"

Then her expression changing to triumphant hatred, "Besides, she cheats on him all the time! She has three other men. Even better! If she eats up his last sou, it'll be fine with me!"

Arnoux was letting himself be taken advantage of by the Bordelaise, like a foolishly indulgent old man.

His factory was no longer in operation; his business affairs were pitiable, so much so that he had been considering setting up a music hall where only patriotic songs would be sung; the government would surely give him a grant for it, and the place would be a combination of propaganda and profit. But the power having changed hands, he'd had

to give up the idea. Now he was talking about setting up a large hat shop for the military. But the start-up funding wasn't there.

He was no luckier in his domestic life. Madame Arnoux was not so sweet with him anymore, sometimes rather rude, in fact. Marthe tended to side with her father. This only aggravated things, and the atmosphere in the house had become intolerable. Often he would leave in the morning, spend the whole day walking about in order to wear himself out, then dine at a tavern out in the countryside and give himself up to his thoughts.

The prolonged absence of Frédéric troubled his usual routines. And so, one afternoon he turned up, asked Frédéric to come see him as he used to do, and made him promise.

Frédéric didn't dare come back to Madame Arnoux's place. He felt as if he'd betrayed her. But this was cowardice. He couldn't find any excuses. He had to get it over with! So one evening he set off.

Because it was raining, he had stopped for a moment in the Jouffroy Passage when suddenly, in the light of the shop windows, a fat little man in a cap came up to him. Frédéric quickly recognized Compain, the orator whose motion had caused so much laughter at the club. He was leaning on the arm of a person with a red zouave cap, a very large upper lip, a complexion yellow as an orange, and a short beard; the latter gazed at Compain, his eyes glittering with admiration.

And Compain was evidently proud of him as well, for he said, "Allow me to introduce this fine fellow! He's my friend, a bootmaker and a patriot! Shall we have a drink?"

Frédéric having thanked them but declined, Compain began speaking bitterly about the Rateau proposal, which was clearly a maneuver by the aristocrats.[57] The only way to deal with them was to revive the methods of '93! Then he asked Frédéric for news about Regimbart and some other well-known names, like Masselin, Sanson, Lecornu, and a certain Deslauriers, who had been involved in the affair of the carbines that had recently been intercepted in Troyes.

All this was new to Frédéric. Compain didn't know anything further and took his leave, saying, "See you soon, because you're a member, right?"

"A member of what?"

"The calf's head!"

"What calf's head?"

"Oh, you joker!" said Compain, giving him a little tap on the stomach.

And the two terrorists slipped into a café.

Ten minutes later, Frédéric was no longer thinking about Deslauriers. He stood on the sidewalk on the Rue Paradis, in front of a house; and he was looking up at the second story, where a lamp was burning behind a curtain.

Finally he went up the stairs.

"Is Arnoux in?"

The maid replied, "No, but do come in."

And as she swept the door open, she said, "Madame, it's Monsieur Moreau."

Madame Arnoux stood up, pale as the collar on her dress. She was trembling.

"To what do I owe the honor of . . . this unexpected visit?"

"Nothing at all—just the pleasure of seeing some old friends!"

And as he sat down, he asked, "How is our good Arnoux doing?"

"Very well! He's not here."

"Ah, I understand! His usual habit, going out in the evening, looking for a little distraction!"

"And why not? After a day spent doing calculations, the mind needs a little rest."

She went on to boast about what a hard worker her husband was. This eulogy annoyed Frédéric; and pointing to a piece of black material, with blue braiding, that she had on her knees, "What are you working on there?"

"It's a jacket I'm altering for my daughter."

"Speaking of her, I don't see her. Where is she?"

"She's at her boarding school," said Madame Arnoux.

Tears came to her eyes; she struggled against them, focusing on her needle and working it rapidly. Out of discretion, he picked up a copy of *L'Illustration* from the table next to her.

"These Cham caricatures are funny, aren't they?"[58]

"Yes."

Then they were silent again.

A gust of wind came up, suddenly rattling the windows.

"Such weather!" said Frédéric.

"Yes! It was very good of you to come visit in all this rain."

"Oh, it doesn't bother me! I'm not like those people who would let the weather keep them from a rendezvous."

"What rendezvous?" she asked, innocently.

"You really don't remember?"

She shuddered slightly and bowed her head.

He put his hand gently on her arm.

"I have to tell you that you caused me a great deal of pain that day!"

She replied in a tone that sounded like a lamentation. "But I was afraid for my child!"

She told him about little Eugène's sickness, and all the anguish she had gone through on that day.

"Thank you! Thank you! Now I understand! And I love you as much as ever!"

"No—no, that isn't true!"

"Why do you say that?"

She looked at him coldly.

"You're forgetting the other woman! The one you take to the races! The one whose portrait you own, your mistress!"

"All right, yes!" Frédéric cried. "I don't deny anything! I'm a miserable creature! But listen to me!" If he had indeed made her his mistress, it was out of despair, a kind of suicide. Besides, he had made her very unhappy, in order to take out his own sense of shame on her. "What torture it was! Can you understand me?"

Madame Arnoux turned her beautiful face toward him, holding out her hand; and they both closed their eyes, sinking into a rapture, an infinitely sweet, gentle peace. Then they simply looked at each other, contemplated each other, face to face.

"Could you possibly believe that I had stopped loving you?"

She replied quietly, her voice like a caress, "No! Despite it all, I felt, deep in my heart, that that was impossible, and that one day the obstacle between you and me would vanish!"

"I felt the same! And I needed to see you so badly, I nearly died of it."

"Once," she replied, "at the Palais Royal, I passed close by you!"

"Really?"

And he told her what bliss it had been to find her at the Dambreuse home.

"But oh, how I hated you that evening when I left!"

"Poor boy!"

"My life has been so sad."

"Yes, and mine too . . . If it were only the sorrows, the anxieties, the humiliations, everything I have to endure as a wife and a mother, I wouldn't complain, because after all, everyone has to die some day; but what's really horrible is this solitude—there's just nobody, nobody . . ."

"But I'm there! Me!"

"Oh, yes!"

A great, passionate sob made her shudder. She opened up her arms; and they stood, locked in a long kiss.

They heard the floor creak. A woman was standing by them: Rosanette. Madame Arnoux recognized her; her eyes were wide with shock and indignation as she stared at her. Finally, Rosanette said, "I've come to speak to Monsieur Arnoux, on business."

"He isn't here, as you can see."

"Ah, yes, I see! Your maid was right! My apologies!"

Then, turning to Frédéric: "You're here? Why?"

Her use of the familiar *tu,* right in front of her, made Madame Arnoux redden, as if she'd been slapped in the face.

"He isn't here—I've already told you!"

The Marshal, then, looked casually around and said, calmly, "Shall we go home? I have a cab waiting."

He pretended not to understand her.

"Come on—let's go!"

"Ah, yes, this is the perfect opportunity! Go along! Go!" said Madame Arnoux.

They went out together. She leaned over the railing to watch them one last time; and a bitter, painful laugh burst down upon them from the top of the stairs. Frédéric pushed Rosanette into the cab, sat down facing her, and said not a word for the entire drive.

The infamy, the disgrace burned within him, knowing that he was the cause of it all. He felt both the shame of a crushing humiliation and the loss of a happiness he'd almost grasped; just when he'd been about to possess it, it became impossible, irrevocably impossible!—and it was all because of this one, this woman, this slut. He wished he could strangle her; he was suffocating. When they arrived at their home, he threw his hat on a chair and ripped off his cravat.

"You've done a real piece of work tonight, haven't you?"

She stood, proudly, in front of him.

"And so what? Where's the harm?"

"What—you're spying on me!"

"Is that my fault? Why do you go off and spend your time with respectable women?"

"Stop it! I won't let you insult them."

"How did I insult her?"

He couldn't think of anything to say; then, in a hateful tone: "But that other time, on the Champ-de-Mars . . ."

"Oh, I'm bored to death with your old mistresses!"

He raised his fist.

"Don't kill me! I'm pregnant!"

Frédéric stepped back.

"You're lying!"

"But just look at me!"

She took a candlestick and held it up by her face.

"Recognize the signs?"

Little yellow spots dotted her skin, which was unusually puffy. Frédéric couldn't deny the evidence. He went over to open the window, paced around a few times, then slumped in an armchair.

This new development was a catastrophe that, in the first place, meant he would have to postpone breaking up with her—and that spelled the ruin of all his plans. And the idea of being a father struck him as grotesque, completely impossible. But why? If it had been someone other than the Marshal . . . and now he entered a reverie so deep that it was almost like a hallucination. He could see, right in front of him on the carpet, in front of the fireplace, a little girl. She looked like Madame Arnoux and even a little like himself—brunette with white skin, black eyes, dark eyebrows, a pink ribbon in her curly hair! (Oh, how he would have loved her!) And he thought he could hear her voice: "Papa! Papa!"

Rosanette came back from undressing; she stood close to him, and seeing a tear on his eyelash, she bent and kissed his forehead solemnly. He stood up and said, "By God—we're not going to abort this kid!"

Now she started babbling away. It would be a boy, no doubt about it! And they'd name him Frédéric. She needed to get started purchasing the things he'd need—and seeing her so happy, he felt a rush of

pity. Since he no longer felt, now, any anger at her, he asked her to explain why she had acted as she had this evening.

It was because Mademoiselle Vatnaz had sent her, that same day, an overdue bill; and she had hurried over to Arnoux to get some money.

"I would have given it to you!" said Frédéric.

"It would have been simpler to go over there and get the money to pay the other back her thousand francs."

"Is that really the whole amount you owe her?"

She replied, "Of course!"

The next evening at nine (the time the porter had indicated she'd be home), Frédéric appeared at the home of Mademoiselle Vatnaz.

In the foyer, he stumbled against some furniture that had been piled there. He could hear voices and music, which guided him forward until he opened a door and found himself in the midst of a social gathering. A woman in spectacles was playing a piano, and Delmar stood beside it, as solemn as a pontiff, declaiming a humanitarian poem about prostitution; and his deep, cavernous voice, supported by sustained chords, rolled like thunder around the room. Lining the wall was a row of women, most of them dressed in somber-colored dresses without collars or cuffs. Five or six men, intellectuals all, were seated here and there around the room. A former fabulist, a wreck of a man, was there too, in an armchair[59]—and the acrid smell of the two lamps mixed with the odor of chocolate, which was piled in bowls on a card table.

Mademoiselle Vatnaz, an oriental sash around her waist, stood on one side of the fireplace. Dussardier was on the other side, facing her; he looked vaguely embarrassed at being there. Moreover, this artistic milieu was intimidating to him.

Had Vatnaz broken off with Delmar? Perhaps not. But she was keeping an eye on the brave clerk; and Frédéric having asked if he might have a word with her, she made a sign for Dussardier to follow them into her room. When the thousand francs were laid out for her, she asked for the interest as well.

"Oh, that's not worth bothering about," said Dussardier.

"You be quiet!"

This cowardice on the part of a courageous man pleased Frédéric because it seemed to justify his own. He brought back the receipt, and never again raised the topic of the scene at Madame Arnoux's. But now all the Marshal's weaknesses became increasingly evident to him.

Her taste was so bad it was irremediable, her laziness incomprehensible, and her ignorance on the level of a savage, to the point of thinking Doctor Des Rogis was a real celebrity[60]; and she was proud to welcome him and his wife to her home because they were "married folks." She reigned like a despot over the life of Mademoiselle Irma, a poor little thing with a tiny voice who was being kept by "a true gentleman," an ex-customs officer who did card tricks; Rosanette called him "my big sweetie." Frédéric could no longer tolerate the idiotic phrases she liked to use, like "No way!" and "Get out of here!" and "Well, you never can tell," and so forth; and she would never fail to dust off her knickknacks every morning, using a pair of old white gloves. He found the way she treated her maid revolting: her wages were always late in coming, and Rosanette even borrowed money from her. On the days the two of them worked out their accounts, they quarreled like a couple of fishwives, and then reconciled with big hugs. It was no longer a pleasure to be alone with Rosanette. He was greatly relieved when Madame Dambreuse's soirees started up again.

That one was at least amusing! She knew all about the various intrigues going on in high society, the changes among ambassadors, and who was who in the fashion houses; and if she did let slip a commonplace remark, it was couched in just the right tone so that you couldn't be sure whether she was being ironic or not. You really had to see her managing a conversation with about twenty people, leaving no one out, managing to elicit just the responses she wanted, and avoiding all the danger zones! The simplest things, when said by her, seemed intimate confidences; the least of her smiles could set you dreaming; in short, her charm, just like that exquisite scent she always wore, was complex and indefinable. When Frédéric was in her company, he felt, every time, as if he'd discovered something new; and yet, every time, he found her in exactly the same serene mood, like seeing a reflection in clear, calm waters. But why was she always so cold to her niece? Sometimes he saw her shooting strange glances in the girl's direction.

Whenever the question of marriage came up, she objected to Monsieur Dambreuse that "the dear child's" health was not up to it, and she quickly took her off to the baths at Balaruc. When she returned, new difficulties came up: the young man lacked sufficient social position, this great love of hers would pass, and there was nothing wrong with waiting. Martinon had replied that he would wait.

His conduct was sublime. He constantly praised Frédéric. And he did even more: he taught him how to please Madame Dambreuse, giving the impression that he knew what the aunt was like through the niece.

As for Monsieur Dambreuse, far from showing any jealousy, he positively heaped attentions on his young friend, consulting him with regard to this and that, expressing concern about his future, so much so that, one day, when they were speaking of Monsieur Roque, he leaned over and whispered in his ear, in a sly tone of voice, "You're well out of that one!"

And Cécile, Miss John, the servants, the porter—not one of them in that house failed to be perfectly charming to him. Every evening he abandoned Rosanette to come there. Her approaching maternity was making her more serious, a little sad even, as if she were being tormented by anxieties. Whenever he asked her about it, her reply was the same: "There's nothing wrong with me! I'm fine!"

However, there had been five loans, not one; and not daring to approach Frédéric about it after he'd paid off the first, she went back to Arnoux, who had promised her—in writing—a third of the profits from his scheme to provide gas streetlights in Languedoc (the enterprise couldn't fail!), but at the same time suggesting that she not make any use of this letter until after the shareholders' meeting; this meeting kept being postponed from one week to the next.

The Marshal needed money, though. She would die rather than ask Frédéric for it. She didn't want it from him. It would have destroyed their love. He did contribute to their household expenses; but a small carriage, rented on a monthly basis, together with a few other indispensable sacrifices that had to be made in order to frequent the Dambreuse home, meant that he couldn't do more for his mistress at the moment. Two or three times he had come home at an unaccustomed hour and thought he saw masculine shapes disappearing through the other door; and she went out often, never saying where she was going. Frédéric didn't try to get any explanations. One of these days, he would make his decision. He fantasized about another life, one that was both more amusing and more noble. Such an ideal led him to be more indulgent toward the Dambreuse household.

The place was practically an annex to the Rue de Poitiers group.[61] There Frédéric met the great Monsieur A, the illustrious B, the profound C, the eloquent Z, the enormous Y, the old players from the

center-left, the paladins of the right, the veterans of the middle way, all the eternal types from stock political comedy. He was stupefied by their execrable language, their pettiness, their bitterness, their bad faith—all of them men who had voted for the Constitution and were now doing all they could to demolish it—and they all worked busily, putting out manifestos, pamphlets, biographies; the one Hussonnet wrote about Fumichon was a kind of masterpiece. Nonancourt took charge of propaganda in the country districts, Monsieur de Grémonville worked with the clergy, Martinon with the young bourgeois. Each did all he could with what talents he had, even Cisy. Devoting himself to serious matters now, he drove around all day in his cabriolet, doing party business.

Monsieur Dambreuse was reliable as a barometer when it came to expressing the latest phrases. You couldn't mention Lamartine's name without quoting a man of the people who said, "Enough poetry!" Cavaignac, in his view, was now nothing more than a traitor. The president, whom he had admired steadfastly for three whole months, was now beginning to sink in his esteem (he didn't seem to have the "necessary energy")[62]; and, since he always had to see someone as the savior, he had switched his hopes, ever since the Conservatory affair, to Changarnier: "Thank God for Changarnier . . . Let's pin our hopes on Changarnier . . . Oh, we have nothing to fear, as long as there's Changarnier."[63]

Great praise was heaped on Monsieur Thiers above all for his antisocialism book, in which he showed himself not only a fine thinker but also a fine writer.[64] They had a good laugh at Pierre Leroux, who had quoted passages from the eighteenth-century *philosophes* in the Chambre. They made jokes about the Phalansterian tail.[65] They attended and applauded *La foire aux idées,* comparing its authors to Aristophanes.[66]

All that political verbiage, along with the good food, dulled his moral sense. As mediocre as these people seemed to him, he nonetheless was proud to know them, and inwardly he wanted them to respect him. Having a mistress like Madame Dambreuse would fix his social position.

He set himself to doing whatever it was going to take.

When she went out for a walk, he would be sure to run into her, and he never failed to bow in her direction when she was in her box

at the theater; knowing when she would be going to church, he stationed himself next to a pillar, wearing a melancholy look. When it came to providing information concerning curiosities, concerts, new books or revues, he made sure to send off a continual stream of little notes. In addition to visiting her in the evenings, he sometimes came over in the later afternoons as well; and he felt a rising tide of pleasure as he passed successively through the main gate, the courtyard, the foyer, and the two salons; finally he would arrive at her boudoir, discreet and silent as a tomb and warm as a bedroom, where the visitor bumped into the padded sides of the furniture among the many and various objects scattered everywhere: little chests of drawers, screens, bowls and trays in lacquer, in tortoiseshell, in ivory, in malachite, expensive little things that were frequently replaced. Simpler objects were there as well: three small rocks, souvenirs from Étretat, served as paperweights, a Frisian bonnet hanging from a Chinese screen; and all these things harmonized somehow; one was even struck by how superb the total effect was, an effect perhaps enhanced by the great height of the ceiling, the opulence of the door-curtains, and the long silk fringes that draped over the gilded legs of the stools.

She was almost always seated on a little loveseat, close to the flower stand in the window recess. He would sit by her, on the edge of a large ottoman on castors, and pay her the finest compliment possible; she would gaze at him, her head tilted a little to one side, a smile on her lips.

He read her pages of poetry, putting his heart and soul into it in order to move her, and to make her admire him. She would bring him up short, making some disparaging comment, or simply a practical one; and their conversation would return to the everlasting topic of Love! They asked what caused it, whether women felt it more than men, in what ways their views of it differed. Frédéric tried to venture his opinion without sounding either crude or dull. It became a kind of game they played, sometimes agreeable, sometimes tedious.

With her, he never felt the kind of soul-ravishing sensations he felt concerning Madame Arnoux, nor the heady intense desire he had felt, at first, with Rosanette. But he did desire her as a kind of extraordinary, difficult-to-acquire thing, because she was noble, because she was rich, because she was devout—for he imagined that she experienced subtle feelings as rare and delicate as the lace she wore, with

her holy medals pressing against her flesh and those modest blushes he imagined on her in the midst of her depravities.

He made new use of his old love. He described for her all the feelings Madame Arnoux had inspired in him, but pretended that she was the cause of them, all those languors, those fears, those dreams. She received these confidences like a person used to hearing such things, and without exactly rejecting him, she managed to give nothing away; and he was as far from seducing her as Martinon was from getting married. In order to get rid of her niece's suitor, she accused him of being a gold-digger and asked her husband to look into the case. Monsieur Dambreuse therefore announced to the young man that Cécile, being the orphan daughter of impoverished parents, would have no "expectations" and no dowry.

Martinon, not believing a word of that, or perhaps too far along to stop now, or perhaps out of one of those utterly idiotic acts that turn out to be strokes of genius, replied that his own inheritance, fifteen thousand a year, would suffice for them. The banker was touched by this surprising disinterestedness. He offered to help him find a post as a tax inspector, adding that he would put up the caution-money himself; and so, in the month of May, 1850, Martinon married Mademoiselle Cécile. There was no celebratory ball. The two young people departed that same day for Italy. Frédéric, the next day, came to visit Madame Dambreuse. She seemed paler than usual. She curtly contradicted him on two or three subjects of no importance. Anyway, all men were egotists.

But there were some—himself, for instance—who were models of devotion.

"Bah! Just like all the others!"

Her eyelids were red; she was weeping. But then, forcing herself to smile, "I'm sorry! That wasn't true! It's just some sad thoughts I've been having."

He couldn't understand. Well, it doesn't matter; she's just weaker than I took her for, he thought.

She rang for a glass of water, drank a mouthful, and sent it back, then complained that her servants were terrible. To amuse her, he offered to serve as her domestic, asserting that he was quite capable when it came to place settings, dusting furniture, announcing visitors, and in short of being a personal valet, or rather a footman,

though footmen weren't the fashion anymore. He would have enjoyed riding up behind her coach, wearing a hat with rooster feathers.

"And imagine the pride, the majesty with which I'd follow you, carrying your lapdog in my arms!"

"You're in good humor today," said Madame Dambreuse.

But wasn't it folly to think so seriously about all this? Life had enough problems without adding to them. Nothing was worth making yourself miserable. Madame Dambreuse raised her eyebrows in a sign of vague agreement.

Seeing her feeling the same way he did emboldened him. He had learned from his earlier miscalculations, and they helped him see more clearly now. He went on: "Our grandparents knew better than we do how to live. Why shouldn't we give in to the impulses we feel?" Love, after all, wasn't such an earthshaking matter.

"But what you're saying is immoral!"

She sat back in her usual spot on the loveseat. He sat down on the floor next to her, at her feet.

"Don't you understand—I'm lying! And that's because, if you want women to like you, you have to show them either carefree joking or tragic fury! When we simply tell them we love them, they laugh at us! I happen to think that all that exaggerated rhetoric they enjoy is a profanation of true love, and so much so that you don't know how you ought to express your feelings, especially with the kind who . . . are especially clever."

She looked at him, her eyes half closed. He lowered his voice and leaned closer to her face.

"Oh, yes, you frighten me! Perhaps I'm offending you . . . ? Please pardon me! I didn't want to say all that! But it isn't my fault: you're so beautiful!"

Madame Dambreuse closed her eyes, and he was startled by the ease of his victory. The tall trees out in the garden that, till now, had been rustling gently in the wind, suddenly stood still. Clouds too were motionless, long, red streaks in the sky, and it was as if all things everywhere were suspended in silence. Then similar evenings, with similar silences, came back in his memory—but where was it . . . ?

He was on one knee, and he took her hand, swearing eternal love. Then, as he was leaving, she signaled for him to come back, and she said, very quietly, "Come back for dinner! We'll be alone!"

As Frédéric descended the staircase, it seemed to him that he had become another man, that he was breathing the scented air of hothouses, that he was now at last entering into the higher world of patrician adultery and sophisticated intrigues. And to rise to the very top, all he needed was a woman like that one. Avid, most likely, for power, for action, and married to a mediocre man for whom she had done so much, was she now looking for a man of strength to guide her? Nothing was impossible now! He felt like he could ride two hundred leagues on horseback, or work night after night without sleeping and without fatiguing; his heart was overflowing with pride.

On the sidewalk, he saw a man in an old overcoat passing by, his head down, with an air of such misery about him that Frédéric turned to look at him more closely. Just then the man raised his eyes. It was Deslauriers. He hesitated. Frédéric threw his arms around him.

"Ah, my old friend! It's you! Can it be?"

He brought him back to his house, bombarding him with questions the whole while.

The former commissioner of Ledru-Rollin started by telling him about all the torments he'd undergone. Having preached fraternity to the conservatives and respect for the law to the socialists, the former went on to shoot at him with their rifles and the latter got a rope to hang him. After the events of June, he had been mercilessly fired. He'd got involved in a plot, concerning the arms seized at Troyes; they'd released him, for lack of evidence. Then the action committee had sent him to London, where he'd got into a brawl with his colleagues at a banquet. Then, when he'd got back to Paris . . .

"Why didn't you come to me?"

"You were never home! Your porter acted so mysterious that I didn't know what to think—and also I didn't want you to see me defeated."

He had knocked on the gates of Democracy, offering to serve with his pen, his speech, his acts; he had been repulsed over and over; no one trusted him; and he'd had to sell his watch, his books, even his linen.

"I'd be better off dying along with Sénécal on the prison ships at Belle-Isle."[67]

Frédéric was tying his tie, seeming unconcerned at this piece of news.

"Ah, so good old Sénécal has been deported, has he?"

Deslauriers, looking around the walls of the apartment with envy in his eyes, said, "Everyone hasn't had your luck!"

"You'll have to excuse me," said Frédéric, apparently failing to note Deslauriers's tone, "but I have to dine out. You can eat here—order anything you like! You can even sleep in my bed."

Such generous hospitality disarmed Deslauriers.

"Your own bed? . . . But what will you do?"

"Don't worry! I have others."

"Oh, I see," replied the lawyer with a laugh. "So where are you dining?"

"At Madame Dambreuse's."

"Is that . . . by chance . . . are you . . ."

"Don't be so curious!" said Frédéric, smiling, which confirmed the assumption.

Then, after a glance at the clock, he sat back down.

"Well, that's how it goes, isn't it! You mustn't despair, you great defender of the people."

"Oh, hell! Let somebody else defend them."

The lawyer despised the workers, having suffered under them in his province, a coal-mining region. Every mine set up its own provisional government to give him orders.

"Not to mention how charming their behavior has been everywhere—Lyon, Lille, Le Havre, here in Paris! Just like the manufacturers who want to keep foreign goods out of the country, these gentlemen insisted that we banish all workers from England, Germany, Belgium, and Savoy! And as for their intelligence, well, what good did their famous guilds do them during the Restoration? They joined the National Guard in 1830, without having the good sense to take it over! And just as soon as '48 was over, here came the trade unions again with their banners! Now they wanted their own representatives, députés who'd only speak for them! Just like the beetroot députés who think about nothing but beetroot! Oh, I've had enough of these idiots, bowing and scraping first in front of Robespierre's guillotine, then licking the emperor's boots, then worshiping Louis-Philippe's umbrella—just a mob, eternally devoted to whoever promises to put some bread in their mouths! Everybody talks about how venal Talleyrand and Mirabeau were, but the messenger waiting

downstairs would sell his whole country off for fifty centimes, as long as you promised him a three-franc tariff for every errand. Oh, what a disaster it all is! We should have set fire to all four corners of Europe!"

Frédéric replied, "You didn't have a spark. You were just a gang of petits bourgeois, and the best of you were ideologues! As for the workers, they have every right to complain; because apart from that million that came from the Civil List, delivered to them with the foulest flattery, you gave them absolutely nothing but fancy phrases! The *livret* remains in the employer's hands, and the waged man remains the inferior of the master, even in the eyes of the law, since nobody believes in his word.[68] All in all, if you ask me, this Republic is already out of date. Who knows? Maybe Progress is only possible with an aristocracy, or with a single individual. Initiative always comes from above! The people just aren't ready yet, no matter what others say."

"I suppose that might be right," said Deslauriers.

According to Frédéric, the great majority of citizens just wanted to be left alone (a view he'd learned in the Dambreuse home), and right now the odds were on the side of the conservatives. But that party needed new men.

"If you were to put yourself forward, I'm sure that . . ."

He didn't finish the thought. Deslauriers understood, and passing his two hands over his forehead, he suddenly said, "But what about you? What's stopping you? Why haven't you become a député?" Because of a double election, there was a vacancy in the Aube, and a candidate was needed. Monsieur Dambreuse, reelected to the Legislative Assembly, belonged to a different district. "Should I look into it for you?" He knew a lot of tavern owners, schoolteachers, doctors, lawyers' clerks and their bosses. "Anyway, you can make peasants believe anything you want!" Frédéric began to feel his old ambitions warming again.

Deslauriers added, "You ought to find me a job in Paris."

"Oh, with Monsieur Dambreuse, that'll be easy."

"And since we're talking about coal mining," the lawyer continued, "what ever happened with his great company? That's the kind of position I'd like to get! I could be of use to them, and also maintain my own independence."

Frédéric promised to take him to the banker's within the next few days.

The dinner that night alone with Madame Dambreuse was exquisite. She smiled across the table at him, across the flowers arranged in a basket, under the light of the hanging lamp; and the window being open, they were able to look out and see the stars. They said little, probably not quite trusting themselves; but once the servants had turned their backs, they blew each other a kiss. He told her about his idea of becoming a candidate. She encouraged him, saying she would get Dambreuse to work on it.

Later in the evening, some friends arrived, some to congratulate her, some to commiserate; she must surely find it hard not to have her niece close by? But still, it was a very good thing that the young newlyweds were traveling; later on in life there would be difficulties, and then there would also be children! But Italy didn't really live up to the way one thought it would be. Yet the couple were at the age of illusions! And then a honeymoon makes everything more lovely! When the others had left, the last two were Monsieur de Grémonville and Frédéric. The diplomat simply didn't feel like leaving. Finally, at midnight, he got up. Madame Dambreuse signaled to Frédéric that he should leave with him, and she thanked him for obeying by pressing his hand, which was the best moment of the evening.

The Marshal squealed with joy when he returned. She had been waiting for him since five o'clock. He claimed he'd had some indispensable business to attend to on Deslauriers' behalf. There was triumph in his facial expression, a sort of halo around him, and it dazzled Rosanette.

"Maybe it's that black suit that makes you look so good; but I've never seen you looking so handsome! So handsome!"

Giving in to a wave of affection, she swore to herself that she would never give herself to another, no matter what, even if she had to die in poverty!

Her pretty, moist eyes glistened with so intense a passion that Frédéric drew her onto his knees, saying to himself, "I really am a beast!"—while at the same time admiring his own perversity.

IV

When Deslauriers came to call on him, Monsieur Dambreuse started thinking again about his grand coal mining scheme. But nowadays the merging of several companies into one was not well received; people moaned about monopolies—as if huge sums of capital weren't necessary for enterprises like this!

Deslauriers, who had been sure to read Gobet's work as well as the articles by Monsieur Chappe in the *Journal des Mines,* knew the issues perfectly.[69] He explained that the law of 1810 guaranteed that the owner of a property is entitled to the profits therefrom. Moreover, they could make the enterprise sound more democratic by arguing that restricting the merger of coal companies was an attack on the very principle of association.[70]

Monsieur Dambreuse entrusted him with some of his own notes, asking him to take them and draw up a memorandum. As for the manner in which he would be paid for this, he made promises that, by their very vagueness, sounded enticing.

Deslauriers returned to Frédéric's home and told him about the meeting. Also, he had caught a glimpse of Madame Dambreuse at the foot of the stairs, just as he was leaving.

"My compliments, you dog you!"

Then they talked about the election. They would have to come up with some kind of plan.

Three days later, Deslauriers reappeared with a manuscript he was going to send to the newspapers, a friendly letter in which Monsieur Dambreuse said he supported their friend's candidacy. With both support from a conservative and praise from a radical, he was bound to succeed. How on earth did the capitalist come to sign a document like this? The lawyer, showing not the slightest embarrassment, said that he'd taken it upon himself to show it to Madame Dambreuse, and she, thinking it was very good, had taken care of the rest.

This little plot surprised Frédéric. Still, he approved of it; then, realizing that Deslauriers was in contact with Monsieur Roque, he explained his position with regard to Louise.

"Go ahead and tell them anything you want, maybe that I have business troubles; that I'll take care of things; she's young enough—she can wait."

Deslauriers left; Frédéric thought of himself as being strong and decisive. Moreover, he felt a deep contentment, a true satisfaction. His joy at possessing a wealthy woman was undimmed by any contrasting feeling; the sensation harmonized with his environment. His life, right now, was one pleasure after another.

The most exquisite of them, perhaps, lay in contemplating Madame Dambreuse in the company of other people, in her salon. The perfection of her manners made him think of her in other poses; while she talked in an indifferent tone of voice, he remembered her stammered exclamations of love; all the respect everyone showed for her virtue thrilled him as if it were paying homage to himself; and he often had a strong urge to cry out: "Oh, but I know her better than you do! She's mine!"

Their affair was soon widely known and accepted. Madame Dambreuse, all that winter, kept Frédéric trailing along after her into society.

He almost always arrived before her; and he watched her enter, her arms bare, a fan in her hand, pearls in her hair. She would stop a moment on the threshold, using the doorway as a frame, and she would have a slightly uncertain look on her face for a moment, her eyes half-closed as she gazed around to be sure he was there. Then she would bring him back in her carriage, the rain whipping against the windows; passersby looked like shadows as they made their way through the muddy streets; and pressed up tightly against each other, they watched the outer world go by in its vague way, feeling a serene disdain for it. He would use various pretexts to stay an extra hour in her room.

Madame Dambreuse's motivation in giving herself to him was boredom, no doubt. But this last affair was not going to be wasted. She wanted a grand love, and she set herself to showering praises and caresses upon him.

She sent him flowers; she had a tapestry chair made for him; she gave him a cigar case, a writing desk, a thousand little things for daily use so that, no matter what he was doing, he would have to think of her. At first he was charmed by all these attentions, but soon he came to take them for granted.

She would get in a cab, then dismiss it at the entry to a passage, and walk through to the other end; then, slipping quickly along, hugging the walls, wearing a double veil, she would come to the street where

Frédéric was stationed waiting for her; he would quickly take her arm and lead her to his house. His two servants would be out for the evening, and the porter would be off doing an errand; she cast a glance all around: nothing to fear! And then she gave a sigh, like an exile finally catching sight of his native land again. Their success emboldened them. Their meetings multiplied. One evening she even showed up wearing a ball gown. These surprises could be dangerous; he reproached her for her imprudence; anyway, he didn't like the way she looked. Her low neckline showed too much of her scrawny chest.

Then he finally realized something that had till then remained hidden: his senses had lost their illusions. He continued to feign great passion; but in order to fool himself, he had to make himself picture Rosanette or Madame Arnoux.

This emotional atrophy allowed his head to remain entirely clear, and he longed, more than ever, for a high-level position in society. Since he had this stepping-stone handy, he was determined to make use of it.

One morning in the middle of January Sénécal came into his study; and to his exclamation of surprise, he said he was now Deslauriers' secretary. He had come to bring Frédéric a letter. It contained good news, but it also chastised Frédéric for his inactivity; he really needed to come down to Nogent.

The future député said that he would start off the day after tomorrow.

Sénécal expressed no opinion on this candidacy of his. He spoke instead about himself and the country.

Lamentable as the country was, the situation gladdened him; for they were now clearly on the path to communism. The current Administration was leading the way, since every day, more and more things were coming under the control of the government. And as weak as the Constitution of '48 was, at least it didn't fully support private Property; in the name of public utility, the State could now take over anything it wanted to. Sénécal declared himself on the side of Authority; and Frédéric could perceive in this discourse an exaggerated version of things he himself had said to Deslauriers. The great republican was now even thundering against the masses.

"Robespierre, defending the rights of the minority, had Louis XVI brought before the national Convention, and thus saved the people.

The end justifies the means. Sometimes a dictatorship is necessary. Three cheers for tyranny, as long as the tyrant is doing good!"

They talked for a long while, and as they were leaving, Sénécal mentioned (and this might have even been the whole point of the visit) that Deslauriers was getting impatient with the silence of Monsieur Dambreuse.

But Monsieur Dambreuse was ill. Frédéric, having become a household intimate, was allowed to see him every day.

The dismissal of General Changarnier had greatly upset the capitalist.[71] That very evening he had a painful burning sensation in his chest, and he was unable to breathe when lying down. The doctors bled him with leeches, which gave him immediate relief. The dry cough went away, and his breathing calmed; a week later, he said, as he drank his broth:

"Ah! I'm on the mend now! But I very nearly went on my final journey."

"But not without me!" cried Madame Dambreuse, implying that she would be unable to survive him.

Instead of replying, he gazed at her and her lover with an unusual smile, one that combined resignation, indulgence, irony, and, beneath all that, even a touch of amusement.

Frédéric wanted to leave for Nogent, but Madame Dambreuse was against the idea; and he packed and then unpacked his bags repeatedly, depending on the condition of the sick man.

Suddenly, Monsieur Dambreuse began spitting up great quantities of blood. They consulted the "princes of science," but the latter had nothing new to suggest. His legs began to swell, and he grew steadily weaker. Several times, he expressed the desire to see Cécile, but she was at the other end of the country with her husband, who had just a month before been made tax inspector. He gave express orders that they should come to him. Madame Dambreuse wrote three letters, showing them to him.

Not trusting anyone, even the nun who was caring for him, she refused to leave him for a moment, and didn't even sleep. The visitors who came to see her left their names with the porter, asking about her with admiration; and passersby were impressed by the quantity of straw spread out in the street beneath his windows.

On the twelfth of February, at five o'clock, he began coughing up blood alarmingly. The doctor on duty explained the danger. They sent off hurriedly for a priest.

While Monsieur Dambreuse made his confession, his wife looked at him from a distance with curiosity. Then the young doctor applied a blister and waited.

The lamplight was obscured by various pieces of furniture, so parts of the room were in darkness. Frédéric and Madame Dambreuse sat by the foot of the bed, observing the dying man. In one of the window nooks, the priest and the doctor were speaking in low voices; the nun, on her knees, was murmuring prayers.

Soon the death rattle began. The hands turned cold, and the face began to pale. From time to time he gulped in a deep breath; then this happened less and less; he muttered two or three confused words; he let out a gentle breath as he turned up his eyes, and his head fell back against the pillow.

For a moment, everyone remained motionless.

Madame Dambreuse went up to him; and without effort, with the simplicity of doing a duty, she closed his eyes.

Then she extended her two arms, her body twisting as if in the grip of a barely contained spasm of despair, and she left the room, leaning on the arms of the doctor and the priest. Fifteen minutes later, Frédéric went up to her room.

There was an undefinable scent in the air, an emanation of all the delicate things that filled the room. On the middle of the bed a black dress lay spread out, in sharp contrast to the pink coverlet.

Madame Dambreuse was standing by the corner of the fireplace. He assumed she had no very powerful regrets, but she did seem a little sad; so he said, in a mournful tone, "Do you feel sad?"

"Me? No, not at all."

Turning, she looked the dress over; then she told him to relax.

"Go ahead and smoke if you like! You're in my house."

Then, with a great sigh, "Mother of God! What relief!"

The exclamation startled Frédéric. He took her hand and kissed it, saying, "Well, we were free enough before, after all!"

The allusion to how easy their affair had been seemed to offend Madame Dambreuse.

"Oh, you have no idea of the different things I had to do for him, and all the agonies I went through!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh yes: how safe do you think I felt with that bastard of his right beside me all those years, a child he brought into our house when we'd been married five years, and who, if I hadn't been constantly alert, would've drawn him into something stupid?"

She went on to explain the financial situation. They had married under a system of maintaining separate assets. Her personal fortune came to three hundred thousand francs. Their contract called for Monsieur Dambreuse to guarantee her, if she outlived him, an annual income of fifteen thousand francs, along with the house itself. But then, a little while later, he had a new will made, in which he left everything to her; though it was difficult to give a precise estimate at the moment, she guessed the total was over three million.

Frédéric's eyes widened as he listened.

"So it was worth it, wasn't it? Anyway, I contributed plenty to it! It was my own fortune I was defending; Cécile would have stolen it from me."

"But why didn't she come to see her father?" asked Frédéric.

Madame Dambreuse stopped to think about that for a moment. Then she said, drily, "No idea! Didn't feel like it, I suppose. Oh, I know her! She won't get a single penny out of me!"

But she hadn't caused any problems, at least not since her marriage.

"Ah, that marriage!" Madame Dambreuse sneered.

She'd been far too kind to that jealous, egotistical, hypocritical little fool of a man. "All the faults of her father!" She went on to deride him more and more. False through and through, completely pitiless, as unfeeling as a stone, "a bad man, a bad man!"

Even the most cunning people will make mistakes. Madame Dambreuse had just made one, by letting all that hatred come spewing out. Frédéric sat across from her in an armchair, pensive and scandalized.

She got up and came over to sit gently on his lap.

"You're the only good one! You're the only one I love!"

Looking at him, she felt a wave of tenderness, as a nervous reaction brought tears to her eyes. She murmured, "Do you want to marry me?"

He didn't understand her at first. All that wealth had stunned him. She repeated, more loudly. "Do you want to marry me?"

Finally he said, with a smile, "Can you doubt it?"

Then a sense of common decency came to him, and as a kind of reparation he offered to watch over the dead man himself. But at the same time he felt ashamed of that sentiment, so he added, "It would look better if I did."

"Yes, I suppose," she said, "because of the servants."

The bed had been pulled out of the alcove. The nun was kneeling at its foot; and at the head, a priest stood, this one tall and thin with something Spanish and fanatical about him. On the night table, covered with a white napkin, three candles were burning.

Frédéric took a chair, and looked at the dead man.

His face had turned a yellow, almost strawlike color; at the corners of his mouth little flecks of bloody foam could still be seen. There was a scarf tied around his head, and he wore a wool waistcoat; a silver crucifix lay on his chest, between his folded arms.

So it was all over, that busy, anxious life of his! How many trips had he made into how many offices, lining up figures, arranging deals, listening to reports! How much flattery, how much sales talk, how many smiles and bows! For at different times he had lauded Napoleon, the Cossacks, Louis XVIII, 1830, the workers, all the different regimes, always worshiping Power, so much so that he would have paid for the privilege of selling himself.

And now he left an estate in La Fortrelle, three factories in Picardy, the Crancé forest in the Yonne, a farm near Orléans, and a considerable stock portfolio.

Frédéric added up the fortune once again; and now it was all going to be his! He wondered "what people would say," then thought of getting a present for his mother, of the properties he would own, of the old family coach driver he would take on as a porter. The livery would have to be changed, obviously. He would use the big drawing room as his office. And there would be no reason not to knock down three walls on the upper floor to install a picture gallery. He might even be able to set up Turkish baths downstairs. That room Monsieur Dambreuse used as an office was so hideous; what could he do with that?

These reveries were interrupted when the priest blew his nose, or the nun stoked the fire. But reality confirmed everything all over

again: there was the corpse, lying right in front of him. The eyes had reopened; and the pupils, though obscured somewhat by a viscous layer, had an enigmatic look—an intolerable one. Frédéric thought he could read there a judgment on himself; and he began to feel something like remorse, for this man had never done anything to hurt him, in fact, on the contrary . . . "Come on! An old wretch!" And now he looked more closely at him, trying to overcome his nerves, and inwardly he cried out to him, "Well, what is it? It's not as if I killed you, is it?"

But the priest continued reading his breviary; the nun was still now, having dozed off; the flames from the three candles grew taller.

For two hours, he could hear the rumbling of the carts on their way to Les Halles. The windows grew whiter, a cab drove past, then a little troop of donkeys trotted by, and he could hear hammer blows, the cries of street vendors, little trumpet bursts; all of it mixing together into the great voice of Paris beginning to awaken.

Frédéric got to work. He went first to the town hall to register the death; then, when the doctor had written up the death certificate, he returned to the town hall to tell them which cemetery the family had chosen, and to consult with the undertaker.

An employee showed him a listing of the different funeral types, and another showing all the details of the various packages. Did he want a hearse with a roof cornice, or one with plumes? Did he want the horses to wear bows, and plumes for the attendants, special funeral lamps, a man to carry the honors of the deceased, and how many coaches in all? Frédéric decided to err on the side of generosity; Madame Dambreuse didn't want to stint.

Then he went to the church.

The priest in charge of funerals started by criticizing the undertaker's plans; there was absolutely no need for a man to carry the honors; it would have been better to spend the money on more candles! They agreed on a low Mass, with music. Frédéric signed off on their agreement, with the understanding that he was obliged to pay all the expenses.

He returned to the town hall to buy a cemetery plot. A grave of two meters by one would cost five hundred francs. Was this to be a fifty-year plot, or one in perpetuity?

"Oh! Perpetuity," said Frédéric.

He took everything seriously, giving himself a great deal of trouble. In the courtyard a mason awaited him, to show him the prices and plans for tombs in Greek, Egyptian, or Moorish styles; but the family's architect had already discussed this with madame; on the table in the foyer there were all kinds of brochures concerning the cleaning of mattresses, the disinfection of rooms, and different types of embalming.

After dinner, he returned to the tailor to arrange for mourning clothes for the servants; and he had to run yet one more errand, for he had ordered beaver gloves, whereas etiquette called for floss silk.

When he arrived the next morning at ten, the large drawing room was packed with people, and almost every one of them said, after first heaving a sigh, "I just saw him a month ago! Good Lord! Ah well, it could happen to any of us."

"Yes, but let's try to put it off as long as possible!"

That remark would be followed by a little satisfied chuckle, and that would lead right on to conversations that had nothing to do with the deceased. Finally, the funeral director, wearing a black coat, knee breeches, a cloak, mourning cuffs, a sword at his side and a three-cornered hat under his arm bowed and announced, using the usual formula: "Gentlemen, if you will." They filed out.

It was flower market day on the Place de la Madeleine. The sky was clear, the air mild; and the breeze that gently ruffled the canvas on the market stalls also puffed out the edges of the great black sheet hung over the doorway. On the sheet was Monsieur Dambreuse's coat of arms, repeated three times. It was "sable, sinister arm Or, clenched fist, gauntlet argent,"[72] with the crown designating a count, and this motto: "By every path."

The pallbearers carried the heavy coffin up the steps, and the others followed them into the church.

The six chapels, the apse, and the chairs were all draped in black. The catafalque below the choir, with its tall candles, formed a solid blaze of golden light. At the two corners, ethyl alcohol flames rose from the candelabra.

The most important guests took their places in the sanctuary, the others in the nave; the service began.

Apart from a few, the religious ignorance of the rest was so profound that the funeral director from time to time had to signal them

to stand, to kneel, to sit back down. The organ and two double basses alternated with the voices; during the intervals of silence, the priest could be heard murmuring at the altar; then the music or the singing would start up again.

A muted light came down into the church from the three cupolas; but the open door allowed a stream of horizontal bright light to flow in, illuminating all the bare heads; and up above, halfway to the roof, a shadow floated, perforated by reflections from the glistening gold paint that decorated the ribs of the vaulting and the foliage of the capitals.

Frédéric, to distract himself, listened to the Dies Irae, stole glances at the people around him, and strained to make out the paintings depicting the life of Mary Magdalene, which were too high to see clearly. Fortunately, Pellerin came and sat beside him, immediately beginning a long disquisition on the frescoes. The bell tolled. They came out of the church.

The hearse, hung with draperies and tall plumes, set off toward Père Lachaise, pulled by four black horses; with bows tied in their manes and plumes on their heads, they were enveloped down to their hoofs in large caparisons, which were embroidered with silver. The coach driver wore riding boots and a three-cornered hat with a long crepe ribbon attached. Four people held the ropes: a treasurer from the Chambre des Députés, a member of the General Council of the Aube, a delegate from the coal mines—and Fumichon, there as a friend. The coach of the deceased followed, along with a dozen mourning carriages. The guests walked behind, filling up the middle of the boulevard.

Passersby stopped to watch; women, carrying their babies in their arms, stood on chairs for a better view; beer drinkers in the cafés stopped what they were doing and came to the window, pool cues in their hands.

The distance was considerable; and—as it is with official banquets where everyone starts out reserved but relaxes as the evening goes on—the general atmosphere among the guests soon began to lighten up. Everyone was talking about the Chambre's recent refusal of the president's request for an additional grant.[73] Monsieur Piscatory had been too harsh in his remarks, while Montalembert was "magnificent, as usual," and Messieurs Chambolle, Pidoux, Creton—in short, the whole commission—ought to have taken the advice of Messieurs Quentin-Bauchart and Dufour.

These conversations continued along the Rue de la Roquette, which was lined on both sides with shops in which one saw nothing but colored glass chains and black disks with designs and gold lettering on them—which made the shops resemble either caves with stalactites hanging in them, or faience showcases. When they all got to the gates of the cemetery, all the conversation came to a halt.

Tombs rose up among the trees: broken columns, pyramids, temples, dolmens, obelisks, Etruscan vaults with doors of bronze. Here and there one could see something like a funereal boudoir, with rustic armchairs and folding stools. Spider webs hung like rags from the chains of urns; dust covered the bunched satin ribbons and the crucifixes. Everywhere, on the balustrades, on the tombs, one saw wreaths made of immortelle plants, candlesticks, vases, flowers, black disks with gold lettering, plaster statuettes—of little boys or little girls, or little angels held up in the sky by brass wires; a number of them even had roofs of zinc over their heads. Enormous ropes made of spun glass—black, white, blue—draped in serpentine coils from the tops of the steles to the bases of the tombstones. The sun played on them, making them gleam among the black wooden crosses. And the hearse advanced along the wide paths, which were paved, just like streets in a city. The axles creaked from time to time. Kneeling women, their dresses trailing in the grass, murmured patiently to the dead. Behind the green yews, puffs of white smoke rose up, abandoned wreaths and other debris being burned. Monsieur Dambreuse's grave was close to those of Manuel and Benjamin Constant.[74] At this point the ground fell off into a steep slope. One seemed to be standing high up above the tops of tall green trees; farther off were the funnels of the great steam pumps and, beyond them, the whole city of Paris.

Frédéric was able to enjoy the view while the speeches went on.

The first was on behalf of the Chambre des Députés, the next on behalf of the General Council of the Aube, the next on behalf of the Mining Association of Saône-et-Loire, the fourth on behalf of the Agriculture Society of the Yonne; and there was another still, on behalf of the Philanthropic Society. Everyone began to move away, when suddenly someone began reading another speech, this one on behalf of the Amiens Society of Antiquaries.

And every one of the speakers took the opportunity to thunder against socialism, of which Monsieur Dambreuse had died a victim. His days had been cut short by that spectacle of anarchy, as well as his

profound devotion to law and order. They lauded his intellect, his integrity, his generosity, and even his silence in the Chambre because, while he was no orator, he did possess those good, solid qualities that were a thousand times preferable, etc., and they did not fail to pronounce the clichés: "Premature end . . . eternal regrets . . . the other country . . . adieu—but no, not adieu, rather au revoir!"

Earth, with pebbles mixed in, was shoveled; and the world's business with Monsieur Dambreuse had come to an end.

They spoke a little as they descended from the cemetery; it was not difficult for them to speak well of him. Hussonnet, who would be writing up the funeral for the papers, made fun of all those speeches—because after all, good old Dambreuse had been one of the most distinguished bribery artists of the preceding reign. Then the mourning coaches brought all the bourgeois back to their daily affairs. The ceremony hadn't taken too much time; they congratulated themselves on that.

Frédéric was tired out; he went home.

When he arrived the next day at the Dambreuse home, they told him that madame was working downstairs, in the office. There, files and drawers had been emptied and were strewn everywhere, and account books too had been tossed around left and right; a thick roll of papers lay on the floor, labeled "bad debts"; he almost tripped over it, so he picked it up. Madame Dambreuse was almost hidden from sight, buried in the big armchair.

"Is that you? Where are you? What's going on?"

She leaped up.

"What's going on? I'm ruined, that's what—ruined! Do you understand me?"

Monsieur Adolphe Langlois, the notary, had called her to his office and told her about a will, written by her husband, before their marriage. It left everything to Cécile; and the other will had been lost. Frédéric paled. But surely they hadn't looked carefully enough?

"Look around you!" exclaimed Madame Dambreuse, pointing all around the room.

The two strongboxes gaped, broken open by hammer blows; and she had upended the desk, ransacked the shelves, and shaken the doormats when suddenly she cried out sharply and rushed over to a corner, where she had just glimpsed a small box with a brass lock; she opened it—nothing!

"Oh, that horrible man! And I took care of him with such devotion!"

Then she burst into sobs.

"Could it be somewhere else?" asked Frédéric.

"No, no—it was there! In that box. I saw it, not that long ago. It's been burned! I'm sure of it!"

One day, toward the beginning of his illness, Monsieur Dambreuse had come downstairs to sign some documents.

"That's when he must have done it!"

She fell back onto the chair, devastated. A mourning mother, gazing into an empty cradle, could not have been more pitiful than Madame Dambreuse before her gaping strongboxes. Eventually her sorrow—even though its cause was so base—seemed so profound that he tried to console her, reminding her that, after all, it was not as if she were going to be destitute.

"But I will be destitute, because I won't be able to offer you a great fortune!"

She would have no more than thirty thousand a year, without counting the house, which might be worth eighteen or twenty more.

Though this was affluence enough for Frédéric, he did feel some disappointment. Farewell to those dreams, and to that grand life he would have been leading! Honor demanded that he marry Madame Dambreuse. He reflected for a moment; then he said, gently, "I'll still have you!"

She threw herself into his arms; and he held her tightly against his chest, feeling a tenderness toward her that was not unmixed with a bit of admiration for himself. Madame Dambreuse's tears had stopped, and she lifted her face, radiant with happiness, and took his hand.

"I never doubted you! I counted on you!"

But that anticipated certitude concerning something he'd thought of as a rather noble gesture displeased the young man.

She drew him into her bedroom, and they began making plans. Frédéric needed to think now about getting ahead. She even gave him admirable counsel on his candidacy.

The first point was for him to learn two or three phrases from political economy. He would need to develop a specialty, something like horse breeding for example, then write some articles on it, articles that would have some local interest, and always have at his disposition some appointments to hand out, such as at the post office, or a tobacco license, and he would need to perform all sorts of

little services for people. Monsieur Dambreuse had shown himself a splendid model in that regard. When he was out in the countryside, for instance, he had once stopped his coach, which was packed with friends, at some cobbler's, and bought a dozen pairs of boots for his friends, along with an especially ugly pair for himself—a pair he'd actually been brave enough to wear in public for a couple of weeks. The story made them both laugh. She told others like it, and as she did her youthfulness, grace, and wit returned.

She approved of his idea of an immediate trip to Nogent. Their goodbyes were full of feeling; then, in the doorway, she murmured to him one more time. "You do love me, don't you?"

"Eternally!" he replied.

When he got to his place, a messenger was waiting for him with a note, in pencil, notifying him that Rosanette was about to go into labor. He had been so busy the last few days that he'd forgotten all about her. She had gone to a private establishment in Chaillot.

Frédéric hailed a cab and set off.

At the corner of the Rue Marbeuf, he saw a wooden sign with the following written in big letters: "Nursing and maternity home run by Madame Alessandri, first-class midwife, ex-student at the Maternity school, author of various works, etc." Then, halfway down the street, on a small door, a sign repeated (though omitting the maternity element): "Nursing home, Madame Alessandri," with all her titles.

Frédéric used the doorknocker.

A woman who looked like a lower-order maid answered the door and showed him into the drawing room. There was a mahogany table, a few garnet-colored velvet armchairs, and a clock in a glass case.

Madame appeared almost immediately. She was a tall brunette of around forty, slim, with beautiful eyes and excellent manners. She told Frédéric that the delivery had gone well, and she led him upstairs.

Rosanette smiled when she saw him, a smile of ineffable joy; and then, as if she were letting herself sink into a tide of love, she said very quietly, "A boy! Over there! There!" and she pointed to a hanging bassinette.

He parted the curtains and saw, among the blankets, something that was a yellowish red, extremely wrinkled, bad-smelling, and wailing.

"Kiss him!"

He said, trying to hide his revulsion, "But I'm afraid I might hurt him."

"No, no!"

He bent and quickly let his lips touch his child.

"He looks just like you!"

And extending her two weakened arms, she embraced him with an outpouring of more emotion than he'd ever seen in her before.

Then he remembered Madame Dambreuse. He reproached himself for the monstrous way he'd been treating this poor creature whose love and suffering were simple and true. He spent the next several days with her, leaving only when night fell.

She was happy in that discreet house; the window shutters on the street side remained permanently closed; her own room, hung with bright chintz, looked out onto a large garden; Madame Alessandri, whose sole weakness was a habit of referring to famous doctors as her personal friends, showered her with attention; her fellow patients, mostly girls from the provinces, were bored to death, for nobody ever came to see them; Rosanette could tell that they envied her, and she told Frédéric so, with pride. But they had to keep their voices down; the walls were thin, and everybody tried to listen to everybody else, despite the constant sound of the pianos.

Finally, he was just about to leave for Nogent when he got a letter from Deslauriers.

Two new candidates had popped up, one conservative and the other radical; a third wouldn't stand a chance, no matter who he was. It was Frédéric's own fault: he'd let the crucial moment pass him by; he should have come sooner, should have made an effort. "You didn't even bother to show up for the agricultural show!" The lawyer criticized him for failing to make contacts with the newspapers. "If you just would have followed my advice! If we'd set up a newspaper of our own!" He harped on this last point. Anyway, a lot of the people who would have voted for him just out of respect for Monsieur Dambreuse would drop him now. And Deslauriers was one of them. Since he couldn't hope for anything more from the capitalist, he was dropping his protégé.

Frédéric took his letter to Madame Dambreuse.

"And you didn't go to Nogent?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Because I saw Deslauriers three days ago."

When the lawyer heard about her husband's death, he came to her place to give her his notes on the coal business and to offer his legal services. This seemed odd to Frédéric; and what was his friend doing down in Nogent?

Madame Dambreuse wanted to know what he'd been doing while they were apart.

"I was ill," he said.

"You could have at least let me know."

"Oh, it wasn't worth the trouble"; besides, he'd had all kinds of things to do, various meetings, visits.

From then on he lived a double life, sleeping faithfully every night with the Marshal and spending every afternoon with Madame Dambreuse—which meant that he scarcely had even one hour free each day.

The baby was in the country, at Andilly. They went to see him every week.

The wet nurse's house was in the higher part of the village, at the back of a little courtyard as dark as a cave, with straw on the ground and chickens here and there, and a shed with a vegetable cart. Rosanette began by covering her baby with frenetic kisses; then, in the grip of a kind of delirium, she started going back and forth, trying to milk the goat, eating a hunk of rustic bread, breathing in the odors of the dung heap, trying to put a bit of it in her handkerchief.

Then they would take long walks; she would go into nursery gardens, pluck off branches of lilac that hung over the walls, cry out, "Giddyup, little burro!" to the donkeys pulling a cart, stop to contemplate beautiful gardens through the railings; sometimes the nurse would take the baby, and they would set him down in the shade of a walnut tree, while the two women talked the most absurd nonsense to each other for hours.

Frédéric sat near them, contemplating the square little vineyards on the hilly terrain, a bushy tree visible here and there among them, the dusty roads stretching out like grayish ribbons, the distant houses like red and white spots against the green background; and sometimes the smoke from a train engine coming through the wooded hills

would be stretched out horizontally like a gigantic ostrich plume, the tip of which was always blowing away.

Then his gaze would return to his son. He imagined him grown into a young man; the two would be friends. But he might turn out to be a fool, and he'd certainly be a luckless wretch. His illegitimate birth would weigh on him for his whole life; he'd have been better off never having been born, and Frédéric murmured, "Poor thing!" while his heart swelled with an incomprehensible sorrow.

Sometimes they missed the last train. Then Madame Dambreuse would reproach him for being so unpunctual. He would make up some story.

He had to make them up for Rosanette as well. She couldn't understand how he spent every evening; and when she sent a message for him, he was never at home! One day when he actually was at home, both of them showed up at nearly the same time. He had to get the Marshal out while he hid Madame Dambreuse, claiming his mother was coming.

Before long he began having fun with his lies; he repeated to one the solemn oath he had just made to the other, sent them similar bouquets, wrote to them both at the same time, then drew comparisons between the two of them—yet there was a third, the one who was always in his thoughts. The impossibility of ever having her became a kind of excuse for his deceit, and the variety added flavor to his pleasures; the more he deceived one of them, the stronger her love for him grew, as if each of them was somehow stimulated by the other and they had embarked on a rivalry, each trying to make him forget the other.

"Look how I trust you!" said Madame Dambreuse one day, unfolding a sheet of paper on which someone had told her that Monsieur Moreau was in a conjugal relationship with a certain Rose Bron. "Is that the woman you took to the races, by any chance?"

"How ridiculous!" he said. "Let me see it."

The letter, written in all capital letters, was unsigned. Madame Dambreuse at first had tolerated this mistress, as she provided cover for their adultery. But as her feelings grew stronger, she demanded he break it off, something Frédéric claimed to have done long ago; when he had finished making all his protests, she replied, narrowing her eyes so that they gleamed like the veiled points of two daggers:

"And what about the other one?"

"What other one?"

"The wife of the faience merchant!"

He shrugged disdainfully. She said no more.

But a month later, when they were talking about honor and loyalty, and he was boasting about his own (in an offhanded tone, trying to be cautious), she said to him, "That's true; you do keep your word; you stopped going there."

"Going where?"

"To Madame Arnoux's."

He asked her if she would please tell him just where she'd picked up that piece of information. From her second seamstress, Madame Regimbart.

So she knew all about his life, and he knew nothing of hers!

He had, however, in her dressing room, discovered a miniature portrait of a gentleman with long moustaches: was this the one from the vague story he'd been told, something about a suicide? There was no way to find out any more. And anyway, what would be the point? Women's hearts are like those little dressers with multiple secret drawers, some hidden inside others; you struggle to get them open, you break your fingernails, and when you finally see to the bottom, you find a withered flower, a little dust—or, sometimes, nothing at all! Plus, he was afraid of learning too much.

She made him refuse invitations to places where she couldn't accompany him, trying to keep him close, afraid of losing him; and despite their ever-closer union, abysses would suddenly gape open between them regarding insignificant things—how much they esteemed a certain person, or a work of art.

She played the piano in a stiffly correct way. Her spiritualism (Madame Dambreuse believed in the transmigration of the souls among the stars) was no impediment to her financial skill. She was haughty with her servants, and the sight of the ragged poor brought no tear to her eye. The expressions she used revealed her fundamental selfishness: "What do I care? It's not going to hurt me! As if I needed to bother!"—as did a thousand other little, indefinable, odious acts of hers. She would be the type to eavesdrop behind doors, and she almost certainly lied to her confessor. Her need to dominate made her insist that Frédéric accompany her to church on Sunday. He obeyed, and carried her missal.

The loss of her inheritance had changed her a great deal. The traces of grief, which everyone attributed to the death of Monsieur Dambreuse, made her more interesting; and she continued to receive her many guests. Since Frédéric's unsuccessful candidacy, she had been trying to land a legation to Germany for the two of them; thus, the first thing to do was to adopt the prevailing ideas.

Some were for Empire, some for Orléans, and others for the Comte de Chambord;[75] but everyone agreed that decentralization was urgently needed, and there were many proposals to help bring that about: divide Paris up into villages using the major streets as borders; transfer the seat of government to Versailles; move the university to Bourges; close the libraries; entrust everything to the general staff—and everyone praised life in the countryside, for of course the uneducated man was more sensible than the other kind! Hatreds blossomed: hatred of primary school teachers and wine merchants, of courses in philosophy and history, of novels, of red waistcoats and lengthy beards, of any kind of independence, every expression of individuality—for it was crucial to "bring back the spirit of authority," no matter whose or where it originated, just as long as it was Power, Authority! Conservatives now were talking the way Sénécal had. Frédéric could no longer make sense of it; and he heard the same sentiments, spoken by the same men, at Rosanette's.

The salons of the courtesans—and their importance dates from this era—were neutral ground, where all different sorts of reactionaries could meet. Hussonnet, who passed his time denigrating the greatest men of the era (a fine way to bring about the restoration of Order!), inspired Rosanette to set up her own salon, just like everyone else. He promised to write up her evening gatherings; and he helped get things started by bringing a serious man, Fumichon, along; then came Nonancourt, Monsieur de Grémonville, Monsieur de Larsillois, an ex-prefect, and Cisy, nowadays an agricultural expert in lower Brittany, and more Christian than ever.

Other guests included some of the Marshal's former lovers, such as the Baron de Comaing, the Comte de Jumillac, and a few others; their unconstrained behavior and talk wounded Frédéric.

Trying to make it look as though he were the master of the house, he set out to raise the tone of things. He hired a groom, rented a new apartment, bought all new furniture. This spending made his future

marriage seem better proportioned to his fortune. But that fortune was diminishing, and frighteningly so—and Rosanette couldn't understand what he was up to.

A bourgeois by nature, she adored domestic life, a quiet little home. But at the same time she wanted to have an "at home" day; she liked to refer to the other courtesans as "those women!"; she wanted to be a "society lady," and even believed that she really was one. She begged him not to smoke in the drawing room, and tried to make him observe fasting days, because it was what the best people did.

But she wasn't quite true to her role, for she began to turn serious, even once or twice displaying, before bedtime, a little melancholy—and seeing this was a little like finding cypress trees around the door to a tavern.

He found out what was at the root of it all: she was thinking about marriage—even she! Frédéric was exasperated. Moreover, he still vividly remembered her appearance at Madame Arnoux's that evening, and he still resented her for having resisted him for so long.

Even so, he continued trying to find out what he could about her previous lovers. She denied them all. He started feeling a kind of jealousy. Gifts she had received irritated him; and while her character continued to annoy him more and more, at the same time he would feel a rough, animalistic lust for her, but when that momentary illusion faded, hatred took its place.

The things she said, her voice, her smile, everything began to disgust him, that look in her eyes especially, that eternally limpid, empty gaze of a woman. He got so angry sometimes that he could have watched her die without feeling the slightest emotion. But how could he stay angry with her? Her sheer sweetness was disarming.

Deslauriers reappeared, explaining that he had been staying in Nogent, trying to buy a lawyer's practice. Frédéric was glad to see him again: at last, there was somebody else! He made him the third in their trio.

The lawyer dined with them sometimes, and whenever some little dispute arose, he always sided with Rosanette, so much so that Frédéric told him, "Go ahead and sleep with her if you'd like!" so eager was he for some excuse to be done with her.

Around the middle of June, she received a writ from Monsieur Athanase Gautherot, bailiff, demanding that she pay the sum of four

thousand francs to Mademoiselle Clémence Vatnaz; otherwise, her goods would be seized the following day.

In fact she had only paid off one of the four loans, and whatever money she'd come into since then had been spent on other things.

She hurried over to Arnoux's. The porter told her he was now living in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but he didn't know the street. She rushed around to see various friends, found no one home, and came back feeling desperate. She didn't want to say anything about it to Frédéric, terrified that this new situation might put an end to her marriage plan.

The next morning, Monsieur Athanase Gautherot appeared, flanked by two acolytes, one pale and surly, looking as if he were being eaten alive by envy, and the other wearing a detachable collar, tight-fitting trouser straps, and a black taffeta protector on his index finger: both of them were repulsively ugly, with dirty collars and too-short sleeves.

Their boss, however, was a fine-looking man who began by excusing himself for the unpleasant job he had to do, all the while gazing around carefully at the apartment, which he found "just full of so many pretty things, I swear!" He added, "I mean to say, apart from the things that can't be seized," and at a hand gesture from him, the two assistants got started.

Then he paid her even more compliments. Could it really be possible that a person as . . . charming as she really had no one who could step in and help! Having to sell by order of the court is a terrible thing! One never gets over it. He tried to frighten her; then, seeing she was upset, he switched abruptly to a paternal tone. He knew how the world worked, and he had dealt with plenty of women; as he mentioned their names, he looked closely at the pictures on the walls. These were old paintings from good old Arnoux, sketches by Sombaz, watercolors by Burrieu, and three landscapes by Dittmer. Rosanette clearly didn't know their worth. Monsieur Gautherot turned to her:

"Listen! To show you what a decent fellow I am, let's make a deal: you give me those Dittmers, and I'll pay off everything. Agreed?"

Just then Frédéric—who, coming in, had seen the two assistants and had been informed by Delphine—came into the room, stomping angrily. Monsieur Gautherot resumed his dignity; as the door remained open, he called out: "Continue, gentlemen; let's continue

our inventory! In the second room, let's say: one oak table, with two leaves, two sideboards . . ."

Frédéric stopped him, asking if there weren't some way of stopping the seizure.

"Oh, of course! Who paid for the furniture?"

"I did."

"All right, then you should write up a claim; that will buy some time."

Monsieur Gautherot quickly finished up his inventory, listing Mademoiselle Bron in his report, and then left.

Frédéric did not reproach her. He looked down at the muddy footprints left by the assistants and said, as if to himself, "We're going to have to find some money!"

"Oh—for God's sake, what a fool I've been!" exclaimed the Marshal.

She rummaged in a drawer, picked out a letter, and hurried off to the Languedoc Lighting Company to sell off her shares.

An hour later she was back. The shares had already been sold to somebody else! The clerk looked at her document, the promise that Arnoux had written, and he said: "This document in no way makes you a shareholder. The Company does not recognize this." In short, he sent her on her way, leaving her stupefied; Frédéric, she told him, had to go off at once to Madame Arnoux to find out what was going on.

But Arnoux might think that he was indirectly trying to get back the fifteen thousand francs from his lost mortgage; and even worse was the thought of trying to get money out of a man who'd been his mistress's lover; there was something vile about it. Trying to find some other way, he went to Madame Dambreuse's house to get the address for Madame Regimbart, after which he sent a messenger to her and thus found out the name of the café where the Citizen was most often to be found these days.

The café was a small one on the Place de la Bastille; Regimbart sat there all day, motionless, in the right-hand corner, as if he were part of the furniture.

After having given a try to coffee, grog, punch, mulled wine, and even wine and water, he'd come back to beer; and every half hour he would mutter a single word: "Bock!"—for he had reduced his speech to the bare minimum. Frédéric asked if he ever saw Arnoux.

"No!"

"Really? Why is that?"

"An imbecile!"

Perhaps it was politics that had caused the rupture between them, and Frédéric thought it would be a good idea to ask how Compain was.

"That idiot!" said Regimbart.

"Why do you call him that?"

"That calf's head!"

"Ah! Please tell me: what is this calf's head anyway?"

Regimbart gave him a pitying smile.

"Lot of nonsense!"

Frédéric let a moment of silence pass, then continued: "So, has he moved again?"

"Who?"

"Arnoux!"

"Yes: Rue de Fleurus!"[76]

"What address?"

"You think I hang around with Jesuits?"

"What? Jesuits?"

The Citizen, furious now, replied, "That swine took the money from a patriot I introduced him to, and now he's set up a shop selling rosaries!"

"That's not possible!"

"Go see for yourself!"

It was perfectly true: Arnoux, weakened by a stroke, had turned to religion; anyway, "he'd always been a religious man deep down," and so, with that combination of mercantilism and ingenuity that came so naturally to him, he thought he'd be able to gain both personal salvation and a fortune by selling ecclesiastical items.

Frédéric had no trouble finding the shop, whose sign read: "Gothic Arts. Church restoration. Religious ornaments. Polychrome sculpture. Incense of the Magi," etc., etc.

In each of the two corners of the shop window stood wooden statues painted in gold, cinnabar, and blue; one was a Saint John the Baptist with his sheepskin, and the other was a Saint Geneviève, roses in her apron and a distaff under her arm; there were also plaster groups—a nun teaching a little girl, a mother on her knees next to a cradle, three schoolboys kneeling in front of an altar. The prettiest one was a kind of chalet meant to be the stable, with the donkey,

the cow, and the Baby Jesus laid out on the straw (it was real straw). The shelves were filled from top to bottom with medals by the dozen, every kind of rosary, holy-water stoups shaped like shells, and portraits of famous ecclesiastics, among whom Monseigneur Affre and our Holy Father stood out, both of them wearing smiles.

At the counter, Arnoux was dozing off, his head nodding. He had aged dramatically, and there was a crown of pink pimples running along his temples, which were set aglow by the reflection of the sun on the gold crosses.

Seeing him so fallen, Frédéric felt a great sadness. But out of devotion to the Marshal he steeled himself, and he started to walk in; at the back of the shop Madame Arnoux appeared, and at that he turned on his heels.

"Nobody was in," he said when he got back.

And though he added that he would immediately write to his lawyer in Le Havre for money, Rosanette flew into a rage. There'd never been a man this weak, this soft; while she had to put up with a thousand privations, other people were living it up.

Frédéric thought about poor Madame Arnoux, imagining how devastatingly impoverished her life must be. He sat down at the desk, and as Rosanette continued her bitter rant, he exclaimed, "For heaven's sake, be quiet!"

"What? Are you actually going to defend them?"

"Yes, I am," he cried. "Anyway, why are you so angry with them?"

"Oh, you don't want them to have to pay, do you? You'd be afraid it might disturb your old flame—admit it!"

He felt like picking up the clock and hitting her with it; words failed him. He said nothing. Rosanette, marching back and forth in the room, went on: "I'm going to sue your fine friend Arnoux. Oh, don't worry, I don't need your help!" She pursed her lips and added: "I'll consult a lawyer."

Three days later, Delphine rushed in.

"Madame, madame! There's a man here with a pot of glue—he scares me!"

Rosanette went into the kitchen and found a rough-looking man muttering there, his face pockmarked and one arm paralyzed.

It was Monsieur Gautherot's bill-poster. The objection to the seizure had been overruled, and therefore the sale was to go forward.

Given the trouble he'd taken to come up the stairs, he thought he deserved a drink, after which he asked another favor—that is, some theater tickets; he assumed madame was an actress. He went on for several minutes, winking at her incomprehensibly; and at last he came out and said that for forty sous he would tear off the edge of the bill he'd already posted downstairs by the door. That was where Rosanette's name had been printed, an unusually severe measure that showed the depths of Mademoiselle Vatnaz's hatred.

In her younger days, the latter had been a sensitive and sympathetic soul; once, in fact, when a love affair came to an end, she had actually written to Béranger for advice. But the rough winds of life had embittered her, for she had, at different times, given piano lessons, managed a boardinghouse, worked on fashion papers, sublet apartments, and trafficked in lace for the kept women of Paris, a level of society in which she developed the kind of contacts that could be useful to many people, Arnoux among them. Before that, she had worked for a commercial firm.

In that position, she had been in charge of overseeing the working girls' wages; there were two account books for each of them, and she'd always retained one of them. Dussardier, out of kindness, had kept the account for one particular girl, Hortense Baslin, and he appeared one day at the pay desk just when Mademoiselle Vatnaz was presenting that girl's account to the cashier, who paid her 1,682 francs. Now, the day before, Dussardier had entered a sum of only 1,082 francs in Baslin's account book. He asked for it back under some pretext; then, hoping to cover up this theft, he told the girl that he'd lost the book. The girl naïvely repeated that lie to Mademoiselle Vatnaz; the latter, trying to get to the truth, affected an indifferent air and came to visit our trusty clerk. He said only that he'd burned it; nothing more than that. She left her job with the firm shortly after that, without believing that the book had been destroyed, instead feeling sure that Dussardier still had it.

When she heard about his being wounded, she rushed to his place with the intention of getting her hands on the book. But having been unable to find it, despite looking everywhere, she soon came to feel respect, and soon after that, love for the young man, who was so loyal, so sweet, so heroic, and so strong! Good fortune like this, at her age, was unhoped for. She threw herself at him with the appetite of an

ogre—and for him she abandoned literature, socialism, "the consoling doctrines and the bountiful utopias," the lectures she was giving on "The De-subordination of Women," everything, even Delmar; finally, she proposed that she and Dussardier become united in marriage.

Even though she was his mistress, Dussardier wasn't at all in love with her. Besides, he hadn't forgotten the theft she'd pulled off. Moreover, she was too rich. He turned her down. Then she told him, through tears, about the dream she'd nurtured, for the two of them to open a dress shop. She had most of the necessary capital, which would be, the next week, greater by four thousand francs; and she told him of the action she'd initiated against the Marshal.

This dismayed Dussardier on account of his friend. He remembered the cigars he'd given him at the guard house, the evenings at the Quai Napoléon, all those good conversations, the books borrowed, the thousand little things Frédéric had done for him. He begged Mademoiselle Vatnaz to call it off.

She mocked him for being such a good friend, and in doing so she revealed an incomprehensible loathing for Rosanette; she hoped she would one day be wealthy, just so that she could crush that woman beneath the wheels of her carriage.

Such dark depths in her character frightened Dussardier; and when he was sure of the date scheduled for the sale, he went out. The next morning he went to see Frédéric, embarrassment evident in his facial expression.

"I need to apologize to you."

"What for?"

"You must see me as a real ingrate, since she and I . . ." He stammered a bit. "All right! I'll never see her again—I refuse to be her accomplice in this!" And when the other looked at him with astonishment: "But it's true, isn't it, that they're going to auction off your mistress's furniture three days from now?"

"Who told you that?"

"She herself, Vatnaz! But I'm afraid of offending you . . ."

"That's impossible, my friend!"

"Ah, that's true—you're so good!"

And he shyly handed him a small leather wallet.

It contained four thousand francs, his entire savings.

"What? Oh, no, no . . ."

"I knew it—I've hurt your feelings," said Dussardier, tears in his eyes.

Frédéric clasped his hand, and the good fellow continued, dejectedly, "Please accept it! It would be a pleasure for me! I feel so bad about this! Anyway, it's all over now, isn't it? When the Revolution finally came, I thought we were all going to be happy. You remember, how wonderful it was! It was like you could finally breathe! But now, we're worse off than we ever were."

He stared down at the floor and continued.

"Right now they're busy killing off our Republic, the same way they killed off the other one, the Roman one! And poor Venice, poor Poland, poor Hungary! One abomination after another![77] And here, they've cut down the liberty trees, put new restraints on suffrage, closed the clubs, reinstated censorship, and turned the schools over to the priests until the Inquisition comes back.[78] And why not? The Conservatives would like to see the Cossacks back! The newspapers are condemned if they dare to speak out against the death penalty, all Paris is bristling with bayonets, sixteen different départements are in a state of siege—and once again, they've refused an amnesty!"

He put his head in his hands for a moment; then, stretching out his arms as if in agony, "But if we only tried! If everybody acted in good faith, they could understand each other! But no! Now the workers are just as bad as the bourgeois! At Elbeuf the other day they refused to help when a fire broke out. Some of those rats call Barbès an aristocrat! And to humiliate the people, they want Nadaud, a mason, to run for president—a mason! There's no plan for change, no remedy! Everybody's against us! . . . As for me, I've never hurt anybody; but I feel like there's a huge weight pressing down on my stomach. I'll go crazy if things stay like this. Sometimes I feel like killing myself. And I'm telling you, I don't need that money! I know you'll pay me back, for God's sake! I'm lending it to you."

Frédéric's finances were tight, so he ended up accepting the four thousand francs. So at least as far as Mademoiselle Vatnaz was concerned, they didn't have to worry any more.

But soon after, Rosanette lost her suit against Arnoux, and out of sheer stubbornness, she wanted to appeal.

Deslauriers wore himself out trying to explain to her that Arnoux's promise did not constitute either a gift or an actual transfer; she refused to listen, insisting that the law was unjust; it was because she

was a woman, and the men always made sure they took care of each other! But finally she gave in and accepted his legal advice.

Deslauriers had come to feel so much at home there that he invited Sénécal for dinner several times. This familiarity irritated Frédéric, who had been lending him money and even had him dressed by his tailor; the lawyer then gave his old jackets to the socialist, whose current means of support were unclear.

But Deslauriers would have liked to be able to do some service for Rosanette. One day she showed him her twelve shares in the kaolin company (the business that ended up with Arnoux being fined thirty thousand francs), and he said, "Oh, this is some shady business! Wonderful!"

She had the right to sue Arnoux to reimburse her for the shares. She would prove, to begin with, that he was obligated to pay all his company's debts, and then that he had claimed that some of his personal debts were collective ones, which meant, ultimately, that he had misappropriated a number of the company's assets.

"And all that makes him guilty of fraudulent bankruptcy, according to articles 586 and 587 of the Commercial Code; we've got him now, my little beauty!"

Rosanette leaped up to hug him. He recommended her, the next day, to his former employer, for since he had to go to Nogent, he couldn't take the case himself; Sénécal would write and keep him informed if anything urgent came up.

He wasn't really negotiating to buy a practice in Nogent; that was just a pretext. He spent all his time at Monsieur Roque's, where he had begun by not only singing the praises of his friend but even imitating, as closely as he could, his manner and his way of speaking—and this had won him Louise's confidence; he tried to obtain the father's by constantly denouncing Ledru-Rollin.

If Frédéric didn't come to visit, it was because he was moving in very high social circles; Deslauriers let it slip out, bit by bit, that he had a child and was keeping a mistress.

Louise's despair was boundless, and Madame Moreau's indignation almost matched it. She saw her son spiraling into the depths of some vague abyss; her almost religious sense of propriety was deeply wounded, and she felt as if it were a personal dishonor—but then suddenly her expression changed. When anyone asked her how Frédéric was doing, she now replied sardonically, "He's doing well, very well."

She had heard about the plan to marry Madame Dambreuse.

The date had been settled; now he was trying to decide how to break the news to Rosanette.

Around the middle of autumn, she won her lawsuit regarding the kaolin shares. Frédéric heard about it when he met Sénécal standing at his door; the latter had come straight from the courtroom.

Arnoux had been found accessory to every one of the fraudulent acts; and the ex-tutor was so visibly delighted by it that Frédéric stopped his narration, assuring him that he would deliver the message to Rosanette. He came in looking irritable.

"Well, you should be happy!"

But she paid no attention to what he was saying.

"Stop! Look!" she said.

She nodded toward her child, lying in a cradle by the fireplace. She had found him so ill that morning when she went to the wet nurse's that she'd brought him back with her to Paris.

All his limbs had become extraordinarily thin, and his lips were covered in white spots; the inside of his mouth looked like clotted milk.

"What did the doctor say?"

"Oh, the doctor! He claimed that the trip here worsened his . . . I can't remember, some word ending in *itis* . . . anyway, he has thrush. Do you know what that is?"

Frédéric didn't hesitate in replying, "Of course," adding that it was nothing.

But that evening he was frightened by how feeble the child seemed, and by the proliferation of those whitish spots, like little blots of mildew—as if life, already abandoning that poor little body, was leaving nothing behind but material on which vegetation could sprout. The child's hands were cold; he could no longer drink, and the wet nurse (another one the porter had found for them at an agency) kept repeating, "He looks awfully low, awfully low!"

Rosanette stayed up all night.

In the morning, she went to find Frédéric.

"Come see. He's not moving anymore."

In fact, he had died. She picked him up, shook him, hugged him, calling him every sweet name she could think of, covered him with kisses and sobs, and then turned on herself, half mad, tearing her hair and screaming. She let herself fall onto the divan, where she lay, mouth open, tears streaming from her eyes. Then she fell into a

torpor, and the apartment again grew silent. Some of the furniture had been overturned. Two or three napkins trailed across the floor. Six o'clock sounded. The nightlight went out.

Frédéric, observing all this, felt almost as if he were in a dream. Anguish gripped his heart. He felt as if this death was just a beginning, and that there would be worse, much worse, to come.

Suddenly Rosanette spoke, her voice soft and tender, "We'll keep him, won't we?"

She wanted to have him embalmed. There were many reasons not to. The main one, Frédéric said, was that it wasn't practical with a child so small. A portrait would be much better. She agreed with the idea. He wrote a note to Pellerin, and Delphine hurried off to deliver it.

Pellerin came right away, hoping his alacrity would help erase the memory of his previous behavior. First he said, "Poor little angel! My God, what a terrible thing!"

But then, bit by bit (the artist in him coming to the fore), he declared he could do nothing with those dark eyes or that livid face; that it was a genuine still life, requiring a great deal of talent; and he muttered, "It won't be easy! Won't be easy!"

"Just as long as it looks like him," Rosanette interjected.

"Oh, never mind looking like him! Down with Realism! A painter needs to paint the spirit! Leave me alone now! I need to think out what form it's going to take."

He stood there thinking, forehead in his left hand, elbow in his right; then, suddenly, "Ah! An idea! A pastel! With colored, half-tones laid down almost flat, I could manage to bring the outline up in relief."

He sent the maid off to fetch his box; then, his feet on one chair and another chair beside him, he started sketching out the main outline, as calmly as if he were sketching from a plaster cast of the child. He praised the little Saint Johns of Correggio, the pink Infanta of Velásquez, the milky flesh tones of Reynolds, the distinction of Lawrence, especially in the long-haired child sitting on Lady Gower's lap.

"And anyway, could you find anything more charming than those little brats! The archetype of the sublime—Raphael proved it with his madonnas—might just be a mother with her infant, eh?"

Rosanette could scarcely breathe; she left; and Pellerin soon said, "So, Arnoux . . . Have you heard what happened to him?"

"No! What?"

"Well, you know, it really had to end that way!"

"What? What happened?"

"He might be . . . Excuse me!"

The artist stood up to tilt the head of the little corpse.

"So, you were saying?" Frédéric asked.

And Pellerin, squinting to work out the right measurements, said, "I was saying that our friend Arnoux might just be, at this very moment, in jail!"

Then, his voice expressing satisfaction, "Look at that. I've got it, haven't I?"

"Yes, yes, it's very good! But Arnoux?"

Pellerin put his crayon down.

"As far as I can understand it, he's being sued by someone named Mignot, a close friend of Regimbart. Now that one's a genius, eh? What an idiot! So they say that one day . . ."

"No, it can't be Regimbart!"

"Oh yes, it is. Well, Arnoux had to come up with twelve thousand francs last night or he was done for."

"All this might be exaggerated," said Frédéric.

"Not in the least! It sure looked serious to me—very serious!"

Rosanette just then came back into the room, red blotches under her eyes, as bright as patches of rouge. She stood next to the picture and looked down at it. Pellerin nodded to indicate he would stop talking about it because of her. But Frédéric ignored him.

"Still, I really can't believe . . ."

"I'm telling you that I was there yesterday," said the artist, "at seven in the evening, on the Rue Jacob. He was even carrying his passport, just in case; and he was talking about escaping to Le Havre, him and his whole brood."

"What? With his wife?"

"Of course. He's too much the family man to go live by himself."

"And you're sure of it . . . ?"

"For heaven's sake! Where do you think he'd be able to raise twelve thousand francs?"

Frédéric paced around the room two or three times. He was breathing hard and biting his lips. He picked up his hat.

"Where are you going?" asked Rosanette.

Not replying, he disappeared.

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Either he found twelve thousand francs, or he'd never see Madame Arnoux again; up to now, he had always retained an invincible hope. Wasn't she, really, the center of all his feeling, the true foundation of his whole life? He wandered back and forth on the sidewalk for a time, anguish gnawing at him, but still relieved to be out of the other one's home.

How to get the money? Frédéric knew very well how difficult it was to get your hands on money immediately, no matter the price. One person, and only one, could help him—Madame Dambreuse. She always kept some bank notes in her desk. He went to her, and he asked, in a bold, straightforward manner, "Do you have twelve thousand francs you could lend me?"

"What for?"

It was a secret involving another person. She wanted to know who. He refused. The two of them dug in their heels. Finally, she declared that she wouldn't give him a thing without knowing what it was for. One of his friends had committed a theft. The sum had to be returned at once, today.

"And what's he called? His name? Come on, his name?"

"Dussardier!"

He threw himself down at her knees, begging her never to reveal it.

"Well, what do you take me for?" said Madame Dambreuse. "You act as if you're the guilty one. Drop all these dramatics of yours! Here—here's the money. And I hope it helps him."

He rushed over to Arnoux's. The dealer was not in his shop. But he still lived on the Rue Paradis, because he maintained two addresses.

At the Rue Paradis, the porter swore that Monsieur Arnoux hadn't been home since the day before; as for madame, he couldn't really say; and Frédéric, having shot up the stairs like an arrow, pressed his ear against the keyhole. Finally, the door opened. Madame had gone with monsieur. The maid didn't know when they'd be back; her wages had been paid; she was leaving now herself.

Then he heard a door slam.

"Someone's there, aren't they?"

"Oh no, monsieur; it's just the wind."

Then he withdrew. The only thing certain was that a sudden departure like this was inexplicable.

Regimbart, the friend of Mignot, might he be able to explain it? And Frédéric took a cab to his home in Montmartre, Rue de l'Empereur.

His house had a small garden on the side, enclosed by railings that were reinforced with metal sheets. The white façade gained some distinction by a little flight of three steps; and a person passing by on the sidewalk could see right into the two ground-floor rooms, the first of which was a drawing room with dresses draped over the furniture, and the second was the workshop for Madame Regimbart's seamstresses.

Every one of them firmly believed that monsieur did important work, had powerful connections, and, in short, was a man without equal. When he walked down the corridor, with that hat with the brim turned up, that long, deeply serious face, and that green frock coat, they all stopped what they were doing. Moreover, he never failed to speak to them, offering some little encouragement, some little but meaningful courtesy—and then later on, when they were back home, they felt miserable because he had become their ideal.

But no one loved him the way Madame Regimbart did, a small, intelligent woman who supported him with what her business earned.

When Monsieur Moreau's name was announced, she came out at once to greet him, having heard from the servants about his connection with Madame Dambreuse. Her husband would "be back in just a moment"; and Frédéric, following her inside, marveled both at how well the place was kept up and at the sheer profusion of oilcloth he saw everywhere. He waited a few minutes in a kind of office, the place to which the Citizen retreated in order to think.

He welcomed Frédéric in a manner less surly than usual.

He narrated the Arnoux story. The ex-manufacturer of faience had talked Mignot, a patriot who owned a hundred shares in *Le Siècle,* into agreeing that that paper's management and editor ought to be changed in the name of greater democracy; and claiming that he would impose this view at the next shareholders' meeting, asked him for fifty shares, saying that he would distribute them among a set of men he could count on, men who would support his motion; Mignot would thus have no responsibility for the move and so wouldn't make anyone angry with him. Then, once the whole scheme had succeeded, Arnoux would be sure to give him a good job on the paper's staff,

worth five or six thousand francs a year at the least. Mignot gave him the shares. But Arnoux immediately sold them and used the money to go into partnership with a dealer in religious items. Complaints from Mignot were answered by prevarications from Arnoux; finally, the patriot threatened to prosecute him for fraud if he didn't return either the shares or the equivalent sum: fifty thousand francs.

Frédéric's expression showed his shock.

"But that's not all," the Citizen continued. "Mignot, who's a decent man, offered to deduct three-quarters from the sum. Now came a new set of promises, a new set of farces. In short, the day before yesterday, Mignot called on him to say he needed to come up with twelve thousand francs in the next twenty-four hours, without prejudice to the remainder of the debt."

"But I have it!" cried Frédéric.

The Citizen turned slowly.

"You're kidding!"

"No—I have it right here, in my pocket. I was bringing it to him."

"Well, when you do something, you do it right! I'm impressed. But you know, it's too late: the lawsuit has been filed, and Arnoux's flown the coop."

"Did he go alone?"

"No, with his wife. They were seen at the station for Le Havre."

Frédéric went so pale that Madame Regimbart feared he was going to faint. He collected himself and was even able to ask a few more questions about the affair. Regimbart felt sorry about it all, because when you came right down to it, this kind of thing wasn't good for Democracy. Arnoux had always been that way, an unprincipled operator.

"A real scatterbrain! He burned the candle at both ends! A skirt-chaser! I don't feel bad for him, but for his wife!"—because the Citizen admired virtuous women, and Madame Arnoux was a fine example. "He must have made her really suffer!"

Frédéric appreciated his sympathy, and as if he'd done him a service, he shook hands with him warmly.

"Did you do what you had to to?" asked Rosanette when he returned.

He hadn't had the strength, he replied, and had been out walking around aimlessly, trying to numb himself.

At eight o'clock they went into the dining room, but neither said anything to the other; they only sighed from time to time, and eventually pushed their plates away. Frédéric drank some brandy. He felt utterly run down, crushed, overwhelmed, conscious of nothing but his extreme exhaustion.

She got up and went to find the portrait. The patches of red, yellow, green, and indigo were in violent contrast to each other, creating a thing that was hideous, almost laughable.

And in fact the little corpse itself was no longer recognizable. A purple tint around his lips actually made his white skin look even worse; the nostrils had thinned even more, the eyes more sunken; his head rested on a pillow of blue taffeta, among petals from camellias, autumn roses, and violets; this had been the maid's idea, and the two women had worked together devotedly on the arrangement. The fireplace had been draped with lace, and on the mantel, silver candlesticks alternated with bunches of holy boxwood; aromatic pastilles burned in vases standing on each corner of the mantel; the total effect, along with the cradle, made the room into a kind of altar of repose; and Frédéric thought of the vigil he'd spent alongside Monsieur Dambreuse.

Nearly every quarter of an hour, Rosanette opened the curtains to contemplate her child. In a few more months she would have been watching him learn to walk, and later on, to watch him go off to school; she pictured him in the schoolyard playing prisoner's base; then, at twenty, he would have been a young man; and as she created these images, every one of them seemed like yet another child she'd lost, as if the excess of her grief had multiplied her motherhood.

Frédéric sat immobile in an armchair, thinking of Madame Arnoux.

She was no doubt on the train, her face looking out the window, watching the landscape flitting off behind her toward Paris; or she might be on a steamer, like the first time he'd met her; but this ship was steaming off toward lands from which she'd never return. Then he pictured her in a room in an inn, suitcases on the floor, ragged wallpaper, the door rattling in the wind. And then? What would become of her? A schoolteacher, a paid companion, a chambermaid perhaps? She was at the mercy, now, of everything poverty brought with it. Not knowing her fate was torture to him. He should have prevented her from leaving, or he should have followed her. Wasn't he

her true husband? And as he thought about how he'd never get her back, that it was all over, that she was irrecoverably lost, he felt as if he were being torn to pieces; the tears he had been holding back since the morning now overflowed.

Rosanette saw.

"Ah, you're crying just like me! Are you feeling sad?"

"Oh yes! Yes, I am . . ."

He held her close, and the two of them sobbed as they embraced.

Madame Dambreuse was also weeping, lying face down on her bed, her head in her hands.

Olympe Regimbart, who had come that evening for her to try on her first colored dress,[79] had told her about Frédéric's visit that morning, including the fact that he had brought twelve thousand francs with him to give to Monsieur Arnoux.

And so that money, the money she'd given him, was to keep the other woman from leaving—to keep his mistress in town!

She flew into a rage; and she resolved to throw him out, to dismiss him like a lackey. But an abundance of tears calmed her down. The best thing would be to hide her feelings, to say nothing.

The next day, Frédéric returned the twelve thousand francs.

She begged him to keep the money, in case it turned out to be needed, for his friend's sake, and she asked him all sorts of questions about that gentleman. What could have led him to do such a thing, to abuse his trust so badly? It must have been a woman! Women will lead you into all sorts of crimes.

Her bantering tone disconcerted Frédéric. He felt guilty for having lied. The one thing that reassured him was the knowledge that Madame Dambreuse couldn't possibly know the truth.

She kept at him, however; the next day she asked more questions about his little friend, and then about another one, Deslauriers.

"Is he trustworthy? Is he intelligent?"

Frédéric lauded him.

"Ask him to come by the house one of these mornings; I'd like to consult him on a certain matter."

She had found a roll of papers that contained some of Arnoux's bills that had been correctly protested and bore Madame Arnoux's signature. They were the ones that had brought Frédéric to see Monsieur Dambreuse during his lunch; and even though the capitalist hadn't

wanted to try to get the money back, he did get the Commercial Court to give him a judgment against not only Arnoux but his wife as well; the latter knew nothing about it, her husband never having thought it worthwhile to tell her.

Now this was a weapon! Madame Dambreuse was sure of it. But her own notary would probably advise her not to make use of it; she would need someone else, someone unknown; and then she remembered that tall devil with the impudent face, the one who had once offered her his services.

Frédéric naïvely passed the message on to him.

The lawyer was delighted to be put in touch with a grand lady like this.

He all but ran to her home.

She told him that the inheritance was all going to her niece, which was all the more reason to settle these debts. She would give the money to the Martinons, with the intent of showing the couple her scrupulousness.

Deslauriers could tell there was more to it; he looked the bills over with great care. Seeing the name of Madame Arnoux, and her signature itself, brought the image of the woman herself back to him, along with the insult he'd had to take from her. Since vengeance was clearly on offer, why not take advantage?

So he advised Madame Dambreuse to sell the estate's bad debts at auction. A straw man could buy them secretly and then bring an action. He took it upon himself to furnish such a man.

Toward the end of November, Frédéric, walking down Madame Arnoux's street, looked up at her windows and saw something posted there, in big letters:

SALE OF VALUABLE FURNITURE, INCLUDING KITCHEN UTENSILS,
PERSONAL AND TABLE LINEN, CHEMISES, LACES, SKIRTS,
LINGERIE, FRENCH AND INDIAN CASHMERES, ÉRARD PIANO,
TWO RENAISSANCE OAKEN CHESTS, VENETIAN MIRRORS,
CHINESE AND JAPANESE PORCELAINS.

"That's their furniture!" he thought; the porter confirmed it.

But as to the person who was making them sell, he couldn't say. But the auction master, Maître Berthelmot, might be able to tell him.

The official clearly didn't want to say, at first, which creditor was forcing the sale. Frédéric insisted. It was a certain Monsieur Sénécal, a business agent; and Maître Berthelmot was so kind as to give him his own copy of the *Petites Affiches.*[80]

When Frédéric got to Rosanette's, he opened it and threw it on the table.

"Read that!"

"Well, what is it?" she asked, with an expression of such placidity that he felt revolted.

"Yes, by all means play innocent!"

"I don't understand."

"Aren't you the one making Madame Arnoux sell up?"

She reread the notice.

"Where's her name?"

"It's her furniture! You know it better than I do!"

"What's it got to do with me?" she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"What's it got to do with you? You're getting your revenge, that's all! It's another one of your lawsuits! Didn't you carry your insolence so far as to go to her home and insult her there? You, a whore, a nobody. And she, the most saintly woman, the most charming, the best! Why are you determined to ruin her?"

"You've got it wrong, all wrong!"

"Oh, come on! As if you didn't put Sénécal up to this!"

"That's ridiculous!"

Then he was overwhelmed with rage.

"You're lying! You're a miserable liar! You're jealous of her! You've already got a judgment against her husband! Sénécal is already mixed up in your business! He detests Arnoux; the two of you hate him. I saw how happy he was when you won your suit about the kaolin. And you still deny it?"

"I give you my word . . ."

"Oh, I know all about your word!"

Frédéric went on to list all her lovers by name and with circumstantial details. Rosanette paled and stepped back.

"Oh, that surprises you! You thought I was blind, but I was just closing my eyes to it. But now I've had enough. A man doesn't go off and die when he's been betrayed by a woman like you. When the betrayals get too monstrous, he just drops her; punishing her would only degrade him."

She was wringing her hands.

"My God, what's happened to you?"

"You, just you—that's what's happened to me!"

"And all this over Madame Arnoux . . ." cried Rosanette, bursting into tears.

He said, coldly, "She's the only one I've ever loved."

That insult made her tears stop.

"Ah, well, that shows your good taste! A woman of a certain age, skin the color of licorice, thick at the waist, eyes like a couple of basement windows and just as dead! Well, if that's what you want, go, go get her!"

"That's what I wanted to hear! Thank you."

Rosanette stood still, stupefied by this outburst. She continued standing there until she heard the door closing; then, abruptly, she rushed out and caught him in the foyer, throwing her arms around him.

"But this is insane! You're insane! It's absurd! I love you!" She begged him: "Good God, in the name of our little baby!"

"Admit that you've done this!" said Frédéric.

She protested her innocence again.

"You won't admit it?"

"No!"

"All right, then. Goodbye. And forever, this time!"

"Just listen to me!"

Frédéric turned around.

"If you knew me better, you'd know that my decision is final."

"Oh, no! You'll come back to me!"

"Never!"

And he slammed the door violently behind him.

Rosanette wrote to Deslauriers that she needed him at once.

Five days later, in the evening, he showed up; and when she had told him what had happened, he replied, "Is that all? That's not such a tragedy!"

At first she had believed that he would be able to bring Frédéric back to her; but now she realized that all was lost. She had learned, from his porter, about his upcoming marriage to Madame Dambreuse.

Deslauriers tried to cheer her up, acting lighthearted and being witty; and when it got quite late, he asked if he could sleep there, in an armchair. The next morning he left for Nogent, telling her he didn't

know when they'd see each other again; something big might be about to happen in his life.

Within two hours of his arrival there, the town was in an uproar. People were saying that Frédéric was going to marry Madame Dambreuse. The three Auger sisters couldn't take it anymore, so they'd hurried over to Madame Moreau, who proudly confirmed the rumor. It had made old Roque ill, and Louise kept indoors. Rumor had it that she'd lost her mind.

However, Frédéric was unable to mask his sorrow. Madame Dambreuse, to distract him, redoubled her attentions. Every afternoon she took him out in the carriage; and one day, when they were passing the Place de la Bourse, she thought it might be amusing for them to go in and observe the room where the auctions were held.

It was December 1, the very date on which the sale of Madame Arnoux's goods was scheduled.[81] He remembered the date, and his disgust was obvious as he declared the place intolerable because of the crowd and the noise. But she wanted to have just a look anyway. The carriage stopped. He had no choice but to follow her in.

In the courtyard one could see washstands without their basins, wooden pieces from armchairs, old baskets, fragments of porcelain, empty bottles, mattresses; foul-looking men in smocks or dirty jackets, all gray with dust, some of them with sacks heaved over their shoulders, stood talking in groups or shouting across the yard to others.

Frédéric pointed out how unpleasant it would be to go any farther.

"Bah!" she said.

And they went up the stairs.

In the first room on the right-hand side they saw gentlemen, catalogs in their hands, examining paintings; in another, a collection of Chinese arms was being sold; Madame Dambreuse wanted to go back downstairs. She looked up at the numbers over the doors, leading him down almost to the end of the corridor, to a room packed with people.

He immediately recognized the two shelf units that had stood in the office of *L'Art Industriel,* her work table, and all her furniture! Piled up along the wall in order of height, they shaped themselves into a rising slope running up to the window at the far end of the room; and toward the other side of the room, the carpets and draperies hung in a row along the wall. Below them was a row of seats, upon which a few older gentlemen sat dozing. To the left arose a kind of counter, behind which the auctioneer, wearing a white cravat, was

brandishing a small hammer. A young man beside him was writing; and lower down stood a robust young man, looking like a cross between a traveling salesman and a street hustler; he was the one who bellowed out the description of each item up for sale. Three other employees carried the items up onto a table, in front of which sat a group of second-hand dealers. The crowd milled around behind them.

When Frédéric came in, the underskirts, fichus, handkerchiefs and even the chemises were being passed from hand to hand and turned inside out for examination; sometimes a piece was tossed from one person to another, and he could see a flash of something white passing through the air. Then they sold her dresses, then one of her hats—a broken feather dangled from it—then her furs, then three pairs of ankle boots—and as he watched these relics being distributed, and as they vaguely recalled to him the shape of her limbs, he felt he was witnessing an atrocity; it was as if he were watching crows picking and tearing at her corpse. The stale air in the room, thick with human breathing, nauseated him. Madame Dambreuse offered him her smelling salts; she found the scene very entertaining, she said.

They brought up the furniture from her bedroom.

Maître Berthelmot would announce the price. The crier would then bawl it out, much louder; and the three clerks patiently awaited the falling of the hammer, after which they would carry the piece out to a neighboring room. And thus disappeared, one after another, the large blue carpet dotted with camellias, which her pretty little feet would lightly touch as she came to him, the tapestried little easy chair he used to sit in to face her when they were alone together; the two fireplace screens, the ivory of which was made softer by contact with her hands; a velvet pincushion, still bristling with pins. It was as if pieces of his heart were disappearing with each one of these things; and the monotony of the same voices, the same gestures, was numbing and exhausting him, sinking him into a deathly torpor, into a feeling of utter dissolution.

He heard the sound of rustling silk beside him; Rosanette was touching him.

She knew of this sale from Frédéric himself. Her initial misery having passed, she decided she might be able to get some advantage from coming. She came to watch, wearing a jacket of white satin trimmed with pearl buttons, a flounced dress, tight-fitting gloves, and a triumphant expression.

He went pale with rage. She looked at the woman with him.

Madame Dambreuse had recognized her; and for a moment, the two of them looked each other over slowly and deliberately, each one seeking some flaw, some imperfection—the one envying, perhaps, the youth of the other, and the other vexed by her rival's extreme good taste and aristocratic simplicity.

At last Madame Dambreuse turned her head, with a smile of inexpressible insolence.

The crier had opened a piano—her piano! He remained standing as he played a scale with his right hand, announcing the beginning price of twelve hundred francs, then falling back to a thousand, eight hundred, seven hundred.

Madame Dambreuse laughed and called the instrument a hunk of rotten wood.

The assistants then set down, in front of the second-hand dealers, a small casket with medallions, corners, and clasps, all of silver, the one he'd noticed the first night he came to dinner on the Rue de Choiseul, the one that had briefly gone to Rosanette before coming back to Madame Arnoux; his gaze would often fall on it during their conversations; it was closely linked to his dearest memories, and his heart was melting, when Madame Dambreuse suddenly said, "Now look at that! I'm going to buy it."

"But there's nothing special about it," he replied.

On the contrary, she thought it was very pretty; and the crier was praising its delicate workmanship: "A jewel from the Renaissance! Eight hundred francs, gentlemen! Practically made of silver! With a little polish, it'll gleam!"

She was pressing forward in the crowd, and Frédéric said, "What a bizarre idea!"

"It bothers you?"

"No! But what on earth will you do with that knickknack?"

"Who knows? Maybe store love letters in it, eh?"

She looked at him with an expression that made the reference perfectly clear.

"All the more reason not to be robbing the dead of their secrets."

"Oh, I don't think it's all that dead." Then she called out: "Eight hundred eighty francs!"

"What you're doing isn't right," Frédéric murmured.

She laughed.

"My dear, this is the first favor I've asked of you."

"Oh, I see you're not going to be a very nice husband."

Someone made a higher bid; she raised her hand. "Nine hundred francs!"

"Nine hundred francs!" repeated Maître Berthelmot.

"Nine hundred ten . . . fifteen . . . twenty . . . thirty!" the crier kept yelping, looking around the crowd and making little nodding motions with his head.

"Come along now: show me that my wife is going to be a reasonable person," Frédéric said.

He was pulling her gently toward the door.

The auctioneer continued.

"Gentlemen, the bid is nine hundred thirty! Any other bids?"

Madame Dambreuse by now was at the doorway; she stopped and called back, at the top of her voice, "One thousand francs!"

A shiver passed through the crowd, and with it silence.

"One thousand francs, gentlemen! Anybody else? Is that final? One thousand francs! Sold!"

The little ivory hammer came down.

She passed her card forward, and they brought her the casket. She thrust it quickly into her muff.

Frédéric felt a chill go through his heart.

Madame Dambreuse continued to hold his arm; she dared not face him until they were out on the street, where her carriage was waiting.

She hurled herself into it like a thief making a getaway, and when she had seated herself, she turned toward Frédéric. He had his hat in his hand.

"You aren't getting in?"

"No, madame!"

He bowed to her coldly, closed the door, and made a sign for the coachman to drive on.

The first thing he felt was joy at having regained his independence. He was proud: he had avenged Madame Arnoux by sacrificing a fortune for her; then he felt surprise at what he'd done, and then he was overwhelmed by a feeling of infinite weariness.

The next morning, his servant brought him news. A state of siege had been declared, the Assembly had been dismissed, and some of the

députés had been taken to Mazas.[82] But these large public events held little interest for him; he was too concerned with his own problems.

He wrote to merchants canceling several orders related to his marriage, which now looked to him like an ignoble kind of speculation, and he detested Madame Dambreuse because he had almost, on her account, degraded himself. He had forgotten about the Marshal, and he didn't even feel any concern about Madame Arnoux—thinking only of himself, only himself—utterly lost in the ruins of what had been his dreams, overwhelmed with grief and despair; and the hatred he felt for the world in which he'd been living, and in which he'd suffered so much, led him to long for the freshness of green grass, the peace of the countryside, a somnolent life passed in the shades of his childhood home, among simple hearts. He finally went out on the Wednesday evening.[83]

Large groups were gathering on the boulevards. From time to time, a patrol would come by and break them up; they would form again when the patrol had passed. People spoke openly, calling out jokes and insults to the soldiers, but nothing more.

"Aren't you going to fight them?" Frédéric asked a laborer.

The man in a smock replied, "We're not stupid enough to go and get ourselves killed for the bourgeois. Let them take care of themselves."

A gentleman passing by gave a glance at the laborer, muttering, "Damned socialists! Maybe this time we can wipe them out."

Frédéric didn't understand such bitterness and such stupidity. It made him even more disgusted with Paris; and two days later, he took the first train for Nogent.

Soon the houses were disappearing, and the countryside began to open up. Alone in his carriage, his feet up on the bench in front of him, he reflected on the recent events in his life, and then on his whole life. He remembered Louise.

"She actually loved me, that one! I was wrong not to grab that chance for happiness. . . . But never mind: no point in thinking about it."

Then, five minutes later, "But then who knows? And maybe a little later, why not?"

His thoughts, like his eyes, were fixed on distant, vague horizons.

"She was naïve, a peasant, almost a savage—but so good!"

The closer he got to Nogent, the closer she seemed to him. As they crossed the fields of Sourdun, he pictured her under the poplars, as

in the past, cutting reeds on the banks of the pools; they arrived; he got out.

He leaned his elbows on the bridge, looking again at the island and the garden where they had strolled that one sunny day—and the fatigue of the trip, together with the new, fresh air and the physical weakness the emotions of the last few days had caused him, somehow roused him to a state of exaltation, and he said to himself, "Perhaps she's gone out; what if I were to run into her!"

The bell of Saint-Laurent rang out, and a group of poor people were standing on the square in front of the church, along with a barouche, the only one in the area (the kind that are rented for weddings), when the church doors opened suddenly and among a stream of bourgeois in white cravats appeared a pair of newlyweds.

He thought he must be hallucinating. But no! It really was her, Louise!—wearing a white veil that fell from her red hair down to her heels; and it really was him, Deslauriers!—wearing a blue suit with silver trim, the suit of a prefect. But why?

Frédéric hid behind the corner of a house to let the procession go by.

Ashamed, defeated, crushed, he took the train back to Paris.

His cab driver told him that barricades had been erected on every street from the Château-d'Eau to the Gymnase; he took him via the Faubourg Saint-Martin. Frédéric got out on the corner of the Rue de Provence, and went on foot to the boulevards.

It was five o'clock, and a fine rain was falling. The sidewalk outside the Opéra was crowded with bourgeois. The houses facing it were shut up. Nobody was visible in any of the windows. The boulevard itself was filled with a troop of galloping dragoons, going full tilt, bent forward over their horses, swords drawn; the plumes of their helmets and their great white capes spread out behind them as they rode under the street lamps, which swayed to and fro in the wind. The crowd stared at them, mute, terrified.

Between the cavalry charges, squads of policemen came forward, pushing the crowd back down the side streets.

But on the steps in front of Tortoni's a man was standing—Dussardier—remarkable both for his height and the fact that he was as motionless there as a caryatid.

One of the policemen at the front of the group, his tricornered hat pulled down over his eyes, threatened him with his sword.

The man stepped forward and cried out: "Long live the Republic!"

He fell on his back, his arms stretched out.

A cry of horror went up from the crowd. The policeman turned to look all around him; and Frédéric, open-mouthed, recognized Sénécal.

VI

He traveled.

He came to know the melancholy of steamboats, cold mornings awakening in tents, the dizzying sameness of landscapes and ruins, the bitterness of interrupted friendships.

He returned.

He went back into society, and he had other loves. But the persistent memory of the first one rendered them all insipid; moreover, that vehement desire that is the very flower of sensation had dissipated. Years passed; he went on living with an idle mind and an inert heart.

Toward the end of March 1867, as night was falling, he was alone in his study when a woman entered.

"Madame Arnoux!"

"Frédéric!"

She took both his hands and led him gently to the window, where she looked him over closely, repeating, "It's he! It's really he!"

In the dim light of dusk, he could only make out her eyes behind her black lace veil, for it obscured her features.

When she had placed a little garnet-colored velvet purse on the mantel, she sat down. The two of them sat there, unable to speak, simply smiling at each other.

Finally, he began asking her one question after another concerning her and her husband.

They were living in the country, in Brittany, in order to economize and pay off their debts. Arnoux, who was almost always ill these days, seemed like an old man now. Her daughter had got married, in Bordeaux, and her son was in the garrison at Mostaganem.[84] Then she raised her head and looked at him.

"I'm actually seeing you again! I'm so happy!"

He didn't fail to tell her that when he'd heard about their disaster he'd hurried right away to their house.

"I knew!"

"How?"

She had seen him in the courtyard and had stayed hidden.

"But why?"

Her voice trembled as she replied, taking long pauses between words.

"I was afraid! Yes . . . afraid of you . . . afraid of myself!"

The revelation hit him like a wave of voluptuous joy. His heart was racing. She continued, "I apologize for not having come sooner." And then, pointing to the little garnet-colored purse, decorated with golden palms: "I made it for you, just for you. Inside you'll find the sum of money for which the Belleville land was supposed to be security."

Frédéric thanked her for the gift, but said she really shouldn't have troubled.

"No, that's not the reason I've come! I was looking forward to this visit, and now I'll go back . . . down there."

She went on to tell him about the place she was living.

It was a low-built house, just one story, with a garden filled with big boxwoods and a double avenue of chestnut trees that went all the way up the hillside, and from there you could see the ocean.

"I go sit up there sometimes, on a bench; I call it 'Frédéric's bench.'"

Then, avidly, she turned to look at his furniture, his curios, his pictures, in order to fix them all in her memory. The painting of the Marshal was partly hidden by a curtain. But the golds and the whites detached themselves from the shadows and attracted her attention.

"I know this woman, don't I?"

"Impossible!" said Frédéric. "It's an old Italian painting."

She confessed that she would enjoy taking a walk along the streets, on his arm.

They went out.

The lights from the shop windows at intervals lit up her pale profile, and then the shadows would envelop her again; and amid the carriages and cabs, the crowds and the noise, they walked along with no thought for anything but themselves, hearing nothing, like a couple strolling in the countryside over a bed of dead leaves.

They talked about old times, the dinners back in the days of *L'Art Industriel,* Arnoux's various habits and tics, like the way he would

tug repeatedly at the points of his collars, or the pomade he put on his moustache so thickly, and other things more private and more profound. How ravished he had felt the first time he heard her sing! How beautiful she was on her birthday in Saint-Cloud! He reminded her about the little garden in Auteuil, evenings at the theater, the time they met on the boulevard, their old servants, her Black maid.

She was astonished at his memory. But she said, "Sometimes, something you said will come back to me like a distant echo, like the sound of a bell carried to me on the wind; and I feel as if you're there when I read love scenes in books."

"You've made me feel the kinds of things that people would say must be exaggeration," said Frédéric. "I completely understand Werther not being disgusted by Charlotte's bread and butter."[85]

"My poor friend!"

She sighed, and then, after a long silence, "Whatever else happens, you and I will have been truly loved."

"But without ever belonging to each other!"

"Maybe it's better that way," she said.

"No! No! How happy we would have been!"

"Oh, I believe it, with a love like yours!"

And it must have been a powerful love to endure such a long separation!

Frédéric asked how she'd come to know he loved her.

"It was that evening when you kissed my wrist, between my glove and my sleeve. I said to myself: 'He loves me . . . He loves me!' But I was afraid of being sure of it. Your reserve was so charming, and I treasured it so much, as if it were a kind of involuntary, continual homage."

He regretted nothing now. All his sufferings had been fully compensated.

When they went back in, Madame Arnoux removed her hat. The lamp on the console illuminated her white hair. It was like a blow to the chest.

To hide his disappointment, he went down on his knees, and, taking her hands in his, began to tell her how he felt.

"Your person, the slightest movements you make seem to have an importance in this world that's beyond the merely human. My heart always rose up like dust when I walked behind you. You were like moonlight on a summer's eve to me, when the air is scented, the

darkness soft and sweet, the light white and infinite; and all the delights of flesh and spirit were present in your name, which I would keep repeating, as if I could kiss it on my lips. I never imagined anything beyond that. It was Madame Arnoux as you were, with her two children, tender, serious, dazzlingly beautiful, and so good! That image effaced every other one. I never even thought of any others, because I always kept, deep inside of me, the music of your voice and the splendor of your eyes!"

She accepted, in a rapture, these adorations of the woman she was, the woman she was no longer. Frédéric, drunk on his own words, believed what he was saying. Madame Arnoux, her back to the light, bent down toward him. He felt on his forehead the caress of her breath, and the vague sense of the touch of her entire body through her clothes. Their hands clasped tightly; the point of her ankle boot had come forward an inch or two from the hem of her dress, and he said, almost fainting, "The sight of your foot is too much for me."

An instinct of modesty made her straighten up. Then she stood there motionless, and said, with that intonation peculiar to sleepwalkers, "At my age! Him! Frédéric! . . . Nobody has ever been loved like this. No, no! What's the good in being young? I don't care about youth. But I despise them, the women who come here!"

"Oh, hardly any do!" he said to please her.

Her face lit up, and she asked if he planned to marry.

He swore that he would not.

"Really? But why not?"

"Because of you," said Frédéric, taking her in his arms.

She stayed there, leaning back, her lips parted and her eyes raised. Suddenly she pushed him back, despairingly, and when he begged her to say something, she lowered her head and said, "I would have liked to make you happy."

Frédéric began to suspect that Madame Arnoux had come to give herself to him; and he experienced a surge of lust more powerful than ever, a furious, enraged desire. But at the same time he felt something he could not express, a kind of repulsion, something like a terror of incest. And then another fear rose up, that of feeling disgust after the act. Besides, what a predicament it would create!—and suddenly, out of both prudence and a wish not to degrade his ideal, he turned away and lit a cigarette.

She looked at him, marveling.

"Such tact, such sensitivity! Only you! There's no one like you!"

The clock struck eleven.

"Already!" she said. "I must leave at a quarter after."

She sat back down; but she watched the clock's pendulum, and he continued to pace the room and smoke. Neither of them could find anything more to say. A moment comes, during a separation, where the beloved person is already no longer with us.

Finally, when the minute hand had passed a little beyond eleven twenty-five, she picked up her hat by its ribbons.

"Goodbye, my friend, my dear friend! I'll never see you again! This was my last act as a woman. But my soul will never leave you. May heaven rain every blessing upon you!"

And she kissed his forehead, as a mother would do.

But she was evidently looking for something; she asked him for a pair of scissors.

She pulled out her comb; all her white hair came tumbling down.

She cut off a long lock, brutally, close to the root.

"Keep this! Farewell!"

When she was gone, Frédéric opened the window. Madame Arnoux, on the sidewalk, signaled to a cab that was passing. She got in. The cab drove off.

And that was all.

VII

Around the beginning of this winter,[86] Frédéric and Deslauriers were talking by the fireside, having reconciled once again; it was their lot in life always to return to each other and pick their friendship back up again.

The former was giving an abbreviated account of his quarrel with Madame Dambreuse, who had remarried, this time to an Englishman.

The other, without revealing exactly how he had come to marry Mademoiselle Roque, told him that his wife had, one fine day, run off with a singer. Trying to purge some of the ridicule that inevitably attached to him, he had thrown himself into his work for the government with such zeal that it had compromised his position as prefect. He had been dismissed. After that he had been, in turn, a director of colonization in Algeria, secretary to a pasha, manager of a

newspaper, an advertising agent, and he was now employed in the legal department of an industrial firm.

As for Frédéric, who had eaten his way through two-thirds of his fortune, he was now living his life on a modest budget.

Then they talked about their mutual friends.

Martinon was now a senator.

Hussonnet enjoyed a high-level position, one that gave him control over all the theaters and the press.

Cisy, thoroughly committed to his religion and father to eight children, was living in the chateau of his ancestors.

Pellerin, after having gone in for Fourierism, homeopathy, seances, gothic art, and humanitarian painting, had become a photographer; and he could be seen on posters affixed to every wall in Paris, dressed in black, with his tiny body and huge head.

"What about your friend Sénécal?" Frédéric asked.

"Disappeared! No idea where he is! And how about you, that grand passion of yours, Madame Arnoux?"

"She must be in Rome with her son, who's a lieutenant in the cavalry."

"And her husband?"

"Dead, just last year."

"How about that!" said the lawyer.

Then, slapping his forehead, "Speaking of these people, I was in a shop the other day and ran into the good old Marshal; she had a little boy by the hand, a boy she'd adopted. She's the widow of a man named Oudry, and she's very fat now—enormous! What a decline! She used to have that lovely, thin waist."

Deslauriers didn't hide the fact that he'd taken advantage of her despair to learn all this himself.

"Anyway, you gave me permission, you remember."

This confession was intended to make up for remaining silent about his attempt to seduce Madame Arnoux. Since it hadn't been successful, Frédéric would have forgiven him for it.

While he was a little irritated by his friend's news, he pretended to laugh; and thinking about the Marshal brought him to the subject of Mademoiselle Vatnaz.

Deslauriers had never seen her, any more than most others in the Arnoux circle; but he did remember Regimbart perfectly well.

"Is he still alive?"

"Barely! Every evening, no exceptions, you can see him dragging himself along from café to café, from Rue de Grammont to Rue Montmartre, feeble, bent almost double, no man there anymore, a ghost!"

"How about Compain?"

Frédéric gave out a little cry of delight, and he implored the one-time delegate of the Provisional Government to explain to him about the mysterious calf's head.

"It's an import from England. Parodying the ritual that the Royalists over there used to observe on January 30, a group of Independents established an annual banquet at which calf's heads were served; you drank red wine from a calf's skull and made toasts to the extermination of the Stuarts. After Thermidor, some terrorists organized the same kind of annual event over here, which only proves that stupidity is contagious."[87]

"Your politics seem a little toned down these days."

"The effects of age," said the lawyer.

They looked back over their lives.

They had both failed to achieve their goals, the one who had dreamed of love, and the other who had dreamed of power. What explained it?

"Maybe we didn't stay the course as carefully as we should have," said Frédéric.

"In your case, maybe so. But in my case, my sin was an excess of staying the course, being too rigid, not paying attention to a thousand secondary things that were really much more important. I used too much logic—and you, too much sentiment."

Then they both blamed fate, circumstances, the era in which they were born.

Frédéric continued: "We never thought we'd end up like this back at Sens, when you wanted to write a critical history of Philosophy, and I was going to write a great novel of the middle ages set in Nogent—I'd taken the subject from Froissart: how my lord Brokars de Fénestranges and the bishop of Troyes attacked my lord Eustache d'Ambrecicourt.[88] Remember?"

They continued excavating their youth, phase by phase, always saying, "Remember?"

They could see it all again now: the school's courtyard, the chapel, the drawing room, the fencing room at the foot of the stairs, the faces

of the teachers and of the boys; one of them was named Angelmarre, a boy from Versailles, who fashioned trouser straps for himself out of old boots; then there were Monsieur Mirbal with the red sideburns, and the two drawing teachers, Varaud and Suriret, one teaching line drawing, the other artistic, and the two of them constantly arguing; and then the Pole, compatriot of Copernicus, with his planetary system made of cardboard, a traveling astronomer who was paid for his talks with a meal in the refectory—and then there was that terrible carousing they went on once, and the first time they smoked pipes, and the days the prizes were given out, and the joy of holidays.

It was the holiday vacation of 1837—that was when they went to the Turk's place.

That was what they called the woman, whose real name was Zoraïde Turc; and many thought she really was a Muslim from Turkey, which lent a touch of poetry to her establishment, situated on the river's edge, behind the ramparts; even in high summer there was shade around her place, which you could recognize by the bowl of goldfish next to a pot of reseda on the windowsill. Girls in white shifts, rouge on their cheeks, long earrings dangling, would tap on the window when you passed by, and in the evenings they would step outside and sing softly in low, throaty voices.

This den of perdition had a prodigious reputation throughout the district. People referred to it by circumlocutions: "that place, you know"—"on a certain street"—"just below the Bridges." The farmers' wives in the surrounding area trembled for their husbands; the town housewives feared for their housemaids, because the cook who worked for the sub-prefect had been caught there; and naturally the place was the secret obsession of every adolescent.

Now, one Sunday, while everyone was at vespers, Frédéric and Deslauriers, having had their hair carefully curled, picked some flowers from Madame Moreau's garden and then set out for the gate that led out of town and into the fields. Then, after a long detour through the vineyards, they came back in through the Pêcherie and stealthily slipped into the Turk's, still carrying their big bouquets.

Frédéric presented his, just as a lover would to a fiancée. But the heat of the day, the fear of the unknown, a certain feeling of remorse, and even the pleasure of seeing, at first glance, all those women making themselves available to him, excited him so much that he turned

pale and stood stock still, unable to step forward, and unable to say a word. They all laughed, delighted at his embarrassment; thinking they were making fun of him, he fled; and since Frédéric was the one with the money, Deslauriers had no choice but to follow him.

They were observed coming out of the place. The result was a town scandal that kept people talking for three years.

They told the story together all over again, and at great length, each one supplying details the other had forgotten; and, when they were done:

"That was the best time of our lives!" said Frédéric.

"Yes, you know, I think you might be right? That was the best time of our lives!" said Deslauriers.